Miscellany.

FOR THE CENTINEL.

[The following Essay was wrote and published immediately after the great fire, March 20, 1760, and is now republished as applicable to the late Conflagration.]

THE uncertainty of human life, the transitory nature and continual vicissitudes of this present state of being and of all enjoyments and possessions in it, are truths so well known to every thoughtful person, and have so often been the subjects of judicious writers in all ages, that the strongest invention can perhaps scarce find any thing new to offer, and a modest Muse with reluctance undertakes the theme: Yet such is the frailty of human nature, that when a sudden Catastrophe surrounds us the mind is shattered and disconcerted, and does not readily collect those reflections suitable to the occasion, or else by having been used to neglect such reflections, from a conception that they must needs flow naturally from such calamities as should produce them, the mind through disease, may not immediately conceive them when wanted. It is true, the voice of nature has always been the same, is continually sounding, and understood by all; yet strange to say, what we hear the oftenest, we attend to the least, and what we are the most certain of, we give the least heed to; but there are times when good providence sends a louder summons by the struggles of nature, and proclaims those truths, which though they could not operate by the importance of their nature, yet may force their effect by rouzing the passions; but here frailty again takes place, from extreme thoughtlessness, the passions being rouzed, we rush on to confusion and error; like pilots growing careless by a long calm, we steer by the gust of passion, instead of the compass of understanding, heedless of the port of truth, and negligent of those duties to which the passions were only designed to urge us.

To point forth and familiarise these truths, has been the well handled subject of the best writers; but while nature continues to summon, and the wisdom of her voice remains in any measure neglected, the theme cannot be truly exhausted, nor the repetition of it needless.

For these ends, this Essay is presented to the public view, if it pass under the judgment of able minds, they will acquiesce in any truth, and at least may from hence take a hint for nobler thoughts; besides, there is a satisfaction we all feel in giving vent to the throbbings of the bosom, and in collecting to some order, those thoughts which float through the mind on such occasions.

Let this then be the apology; but if still any one should censure me for treading in this unaccustomed path of writing, I must quit the dispute and screen myself beneath the horrors of that never to be forgotten night, when the flames broke loose on our houses, and laid so large a part of our capital in ruins: I am sensible that painted terrors ill become real sorrow, and are never to be used but when the passions are sluggish; and therefore passing over that ample field for description, which the late unhappy catastrophe affords, shall confine myself to those sober facts which no body should be ignorant of, and with which every body must needs be affected.

It was then in the first watches of the morning, when our bodies were fast fettered with soundest sleep, that the fire was first discovered, and the town alarmed with an out-cry; the inhabitants were speedily collected, and though the fire was found in the cellar of a brick house, yet it soon eat through its prison; the wind blowing fresh urged on the flames, and with surprising fury they ravaged in spite of all opposition or means to suppress them; the cinders and burning ruins were carried to the leewardmost part of the town, by means of which some who thought themselves in no danger, were the soonest consumed, and the inhabitants of them being gathered to assist at the head of the fire, suffered the greatest losses at their own houses; the like evil happened to numbers of tradesmen, whose shops were so quick fuel for the flames, that their tools and stock were all consumed before they could repair to them; in some places we heard the shrieks of mothers and children rouzed from their beds by the surrounding flames, and no man to help; here we might behold the aged, the sick and the bed-rid, whose distance from the seat of the fire gave them hopes of security, driven forth to the inclemencies of the weather, not knowing where to shelter; there we might see those whose least thoughts were placed on their substance, and whose greatest anxiety was to save their lives: Thus raged this fire, forcing its way at the windows of brick houses, whose slated roofs were thought a sufficient defence, thus adding burning to burning, till it left no building unconsumed where the wind would let it pass. The natural horrors of the night added terror to this catastrophe, and at once rendered it more dismal to the eye, more grevious to be born, and more difficult to be supressed, till the odious night wore out, and with it vanished the height of our fears; but not of the reality of our sorrow, the risen sun assuaged the gloom of the night, but gave us a dismal prospect of its havock; a spectacle shocking to sensibility! Like the blasted trees of summer, or the skeleton of some delightful body; yet far less ungrateful to the sight than sorrowful to be reflected on. Take a survey then of these extended ruins, here once lived the loyal subject, the tender father, the obliging friend, and a good commonwealths-man; but their habitations, as with one sweep of a scythe, are all cut off, and they thrown on the charity of their friends: And is this all? Alas there are still more heart-piercing scenes; walk through the ruins, and take a more particular account; here lived the laborious tradesman, on whose daily industry depended the sustenance of a numerous family; there lived one whose circumstances were straitened with poverty, and distressed by sickness; here lived one just emerging from indigence, and reaping the first fruits of honest industry; there lived those whose comfortable circumstances afforded a refuge for the needy, and an habitation for the friendless; here lived those whose subsistence depended on their situation for business; there lived those whose all was in their houses, and here those who are still unhappily answerable for all they lost; there lived, and there was the subsistence of the aged and infirm, whose frugal industry in youth, had procured them the merited support of easy old age, when the body unstrung for labor can no longer support itself—But all cut off, their industry appears no more, and the fatigues of youth overtakes them, when age should be at rest; the children must beg, and the industrious must be dependent, the forehanded repeat his toil anew, and the debtor lay at mercy; the friendless must seek for other patrons, and they who patronized implore compassion; the affluent aged must forget their ease, and too soon lose the benefit of that substance which they could not carry hence.

Amazing shock! Is this the uncertainty of human life? Is it thus we have no abiding place here? Is it thus that the places that knew us shall know us no more? And do riches thus take to themselves wings? what a gust of passion breaks forth in all our minds? yet let us compose our thoughts, attend the voice of reason, to those solemn admonitions so loudly proclaimed by this dreadful catastrophe: What a lesson then is here of the uncertainty of earthly enjoyments! We lay ourselves down to our natural rest poised of subsistence and affluence, and in a few hours we are awakened to take leave of

all. Where shall the miser bestow his hoards, or the extortioner his all gotten gains, or how shall the worldly man secure his happiness when flames surround them? The huge pillars of smoak which we beheld floating to the sky were at once emblematical of our possessions and declarative of their loss: But what say these mighty ruins? they shew us at how uncertain a tenure we hold our enjoyments, for next under a sovereign providence we seem indebted even to the stability of the wind that it did not vary and roll the flames over the whole town. With how much ease then can we shift the scene and suppose ourselves in the situation of the present distressed; was it our goodness, or vigilance that protected us? And if being destroyed, we should have felt sorrow; being so narrowly saved can we fail to melt with sympathy? and if ever the golden rule was capable of a benevolent application the most insensible must now feel it, and the most hardened put it in practice; and he who on this occasion does not bestow bountifully to the relief of the immediate sufferers, must either flatter himself with some peculiar infallible protection, or being desperate in giddiness, bid a bold defiance to all calamity. Nor can any one, though not immediately exposed to this destruction, or tho' distant from this capital, surmise that they have no part in its general admonition; 'tis nature's voice, that well known herald of the Almighty which tho' it be now uttered here, yet echoes every where; 'tis but one link of that amazing scourge, brandished by the hand of vengeance, against a guilty world; the same fire may parch up that land which it does not consume, and earthquakes make its desolation worse than the present; if therefore we are common tenants of a state variegated with joy and sorrow, methinks 'tis natural we should in some measure share the good of it which we all want, seeing we are equally exposed to the evils of it, under which we all desire to be relieved.

O, my soul, what a thought arises! can it with truth be said, that any in human shape, though their daily support were robbery, should lurk for the confusion of a public calamity, and plunder the property of the distressed; or that any after cool deliberation, upon whatsoever pretence, should either publickly or privately discountenance that relief to the distressed which we may all at some time want, and which humanity suggests? forbid it heaven!

Alas, we sojourn in a vale of tears, sorrow on every side surrounds us, and calls for those duties which we feel impressed in our natures, duties so indelibly engraven, that a heathen said, "in nothing do we more immitate the immortal Gods, than in doing acts of kindness," the voice of revelation is still more explicit, and so plain, that he who runs may read. Possessions take to themselves wings; to what purpose is it then, that we distress, perplex and corrupt our minds in getting wealth, the possession of which is so precarious? With what face can we swell with the conceit of riches and assume airs of importance, disdain, oppress, and tyrannize over those beneath us (perhaps only) in fortune, when a few hours may set us all on a level? How much does it become us while in affluence to demean ourselves with such honesty, humanity and beneficence, as that if calamity should overtake us, we may stand confessedly the worthy objects of needful relief? Methinks this catastrophe is big with instruction, could any one see the dire havock produced from so small a fire, and not feel the obligations we owe to the community in the economy of this necessary but devouring element, and of every thing that is apt fuel for the same? for as our possessions are not secured by our own single carefulness, the duty therefore becomes general; and may I be permitted to take a hint from this dreadful desolation, and point it forth as an emblem of that destruction, which the passions when let loose produce in human minds; when the first excess is not suppressed, like the fire they ravage, increase by running, and may destroy every thing valuable in the mind; may entirely strip us of that real treasure which only can stand us in stead when a greater conflagration shall seize this earth, when we shall be as little anxious to save our lives, as many lately were to save their worldly possessions.

Dr. *Mayhew*'s

TWO

Thankſgiving

SERMONS

December 9th. 1762.

6

TWO

SERMONS

On the Nature, Extent and Perfection of the Divine Goodneſs.

Delivered *December* 9. 1762.

BEING THE

Annual THANKSGIVING

Of the PROVINCE, &c.

On PSALM 145. 9.

Publiſhed with ſome Enlargements.

By *Jonathan Mayhew, D. D.*

Paſtor of the Weſt Church in *Boſton.*

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SERMON I.

Of the Nature, Extent and Perfection of GOD's Goodneſs.

PSALM CXLV. 9.

THE LORD is good to ALL; *and his tender Mercies are over* ALL *his Works.*

NO great variety either of ſubject or ſentiment, can well be expected in ſermons on theſe common annual occaſions. A miniſter who has preached on them ſtatedly twice a-day, in the ſame place, for fifteen or ſixteen years ſucceſſively, will probably have little or nothing that is new, to gratify the curioſity of his hearers. Neither is this what he ought chiefly to aim at, or they to deſire, at any time; particularly not on ſuch occaſions as the preſent.

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A DAY of religious thankſgiving, calls for ſincere gratitude, love and praiſe to almighty God, with hearty reſolutions, by his grace aſſiſting, to make a proper return to him for all his benefits & unmerited favors, by obeying his commandments, and living to his glory. The divine GOODNESS is, accordingly, a ſubject to which One's thoughts ought to be, and are naturally turned, on ſuch occaſions. This can never be an unſuitable ſubject, whatever be the more ſpecial ground of our thankfulneſs; ſince we can enjoy no good, whether public and common, or private and perſonal, whether pertaining to the preſent life, or to the future, but what flows from the ſame eternal and inexhauſtible fountain of divine goodneſs. "Every "good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, "and cometh down from the Father of lights, with "whom is no variableneſs, neither ſhadow of turn-"ing."* A day of thankſgiving cannot, indeed, be properly obſerved at any time, unleſs the meditations of the worſhippers are in a great meaſure, if not principally, employed upon this divine attribute, and the manifeſtations of it in and towards the works of God.

IT is therefore ſuppoſed that no apology needs to be made, for the choice of ſo common a ſubject or text, as that which I juſt now mentioned; even tho' I ſhould have formerly diſcourſed upon the ſame words, as I may have done, but am uncertain. My method of treating the ſubject at preſent, however, will at leaſt be different: Which is mentioned to obviate the prejudices of ſome perſons, who cannot, perhaps, at all reliſh a ſermon the ſecond time, which they might not have wholly diſapproved of the firſt.

LET

* James I. 17.

LET me add, that I have a farther deſign at preſent, in the choice of this ſubject, than merely to lead you to ſuch reflections on the divine goodneſs, as may be particularly ſutable to this occaſion. I have it in my view, by God's help, to give you ſuch a repreſentation and idea of his goodneſs, as ought to be habitual to you; to animate your piety, to ſupport and rejoice your hearts at all times, and to have a powerful influence on your whole lives. Right conceptions, I mean rational and truly ſcriptural ones, of God's adorable attributes, are the foundation of all true religion. And theſe conceptions, if, inſtead of floating in the brain, they ſink into the heart, and are formed into a fixed principle there, called FAITH in the language of ſcripture; are really the *ſubſtance* of religion, and not merely the *foundation* of it, as being neceſſary in order thereto. No man that has theſe conceptions of, or is thus rightly and habitually affected towards God, as being what he is, can poſſibly live a wicked life. He will as certainly bring forth good things out of this good treaſure in his heart, as a good tree will bear good fruit in the ſeaſon. And this will be at once delightful to himſelf, and pleaſing and honarary to God. We ſhall then indeed, and not till then, "offer up ſpiritual ſacrifices, acceptable to God by "Jeſus Chriſt:" Who has himſelf ſaid, "Herein is "my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; ſo "ſhall ye be my diſciples."

WHAT has now been obſerved concerning the attributes of God in general, is very particularly and eſpecially true of his goodneſs. A ſcriptural idea or conception of, and a firm faith in it, habitual to the mind, thro' the influences of the Spirit of grace, will be at once the ſource of great peace and comfort to ourſelves, of hope and confidence towards God, of holineſs in life, of happineſs in death, and like

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" a well of living water within us, ſpringing up into " everlaſting life :" 'As our Lord ſaid of " the water " which he ſhould give." Which the evangeliſt explains by ſaying, " This he ſpake of the ſpirit which " they that believe on him ſhould receive." Let all then, not only believe, but, in the language of ſcripture, " taſte and ſee, that the Lord is good ;" without fear that they may err by thinking him better, or more extenſively good, gracious and merciful than he actually is. This is impoſſible. For if we can believe thoſe holy men who ſpake, wrote and propheſied as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt ; or, in other words, if we can believe God himſelf, who " cannot lie," The LORD is indeed " GOOD to " ALL ; and his TENDER MERCIES are over ALL " his works !"—And, ſurely, no One's ideas can exceed, no One's conceptions go beyond, ſuch a goodneſs and mercy as this ; a goodneſs, which is itſelf without meaſure, without bounds ; eternal, unlimited, immutable goodneſs ; and a mercy, that is from everlaſting to everlaſting. Your moſt exalted ideas will fall far below this goodneſs. Man that is a worm, tho' he may have ſome general and juſt, can yet have no adequate, no perfect conception of it ; which is true of this, in common with the other attributes of God, which are all infinite ; and therefore not to be comprehended by the higheſt angels, thoſe heavenly miniſters, who, as a flame of fire, do his will with alacrity and ardor, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Canſt THOU then, a mortal *man*, " find out the Almighty unto perfection !" Can thy conceptions riſe ſo high as his goodneſs ! " It is " as high as heaven, what canſt thou do ? Deeper " than hell, what canſt thou know ? The meaſure " thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than " the ſea ! " *

THAT

* Job XI. 7, 8, 9.

THAT the true ſcriptural doctrine of God's goodneſs, may be abuſed and perverted; that there is great danger of this; yea, that it is actually perverted and abuſed by many, to the moſt impious and deſtructive purpoſes; all this, I ſay, is very readily allowed. But what follows from hence? that it ſhould not be preached to the world? But why then, preach the goſpel to the world? Is not that perverted and abuſed alſo? Indeed the goſpel itſelf cannot be preached as it ought to be;—as Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles themſelves preached it, without preaching, at the ſame time, the boundleſs goodneſs of God. Wrong inferences from, and perverſions of the truth, ought indeed, as far as may be, to be guarded againſt. But the truth, eſpecially the moſt important and glorious truths, ought not to be even ſuppreſſed, and much leſs denied, leſt bad men ſhould abuſe them. The total ſuppreſſion, at leaſt the denial of them, in thoſe whoſe buſineſs it is to declare the truth, is as criminal, in my opinion, as any perverſion of them by their hearers could poſſibly be. If any will, thro' the wickedneſs of their hearts, "wreſt" this doctrine, as they ſometimes alſo "do "the other ſcriptures," it will be "to their own "*deſtruction.*" But I humbly hope in God, that it will not be to *mine*, to preach *any* doctrine contained in his holy word; and particularly this, "That the "Lord is good to ALL; and his tender mercies "over ALL his works:" Which, my honored and beloved hearers, I ſhall, in his fear, or rather in his love, endeavour more diſtinctly to explain to you.

IT will be proper,

I. To make ſome obſervations on the goodneſs of God in general.

II. To consider the extent and perfection of it, according to the representation in the text: Wherein the LORD is declared to be "GOOD to ALL," &c.

III. To take a cursory notice of some of the principal objections against the divine goodness. And,

IV. To make some application of the subject, by reminding you of the great goodness of God to Us, both in temporal and spiritual respects; and by such inferences and reflections, as may at once tend to the honor of God, and shew what influence the consideration of his goodness ought to have upon our hearts and manners.——Let me then,

I. MAKE some observations on the goodness of God in general. And here,

1. BY the goodness of God is primarily intended the kindness, benevolence and bounty of his *nature*; or goodness as it is an attribute, or property, *inherent* in, and *essential* to him. All beings whatsoever, exist after some determinate manner, having certain attributes, qualities or properties inherent in them, which make them to be what they are. This is equally true of all beings without exception, whether animate or inanimate, rational or irrational, created or uncreated. We cannot speak, or think of any particular being or thing, but as it exists, or is supposed to exist, under certain determinate properties, which distinguish it from all others. For no man, surely, can conceive of any thing abstracted from, or stripped of, all its known properties, qualities and attributes; which are its essence, or all that is known of it. Derived, dependent beings are, indeed, mutable or changeable as to their properties. They may either lose some which they originally had, or receive others which they had not; and yet, in common

mon language, remain the *ſame*. And whatſoever may be thus loſt, or acquired, is conſidered as an *accident*, or a non-eſſential property, in contradiſtinction from thoſe which cannot be loſt without the deſtruction of the being itſelf; and which are therefore called its *eſſential* properties, as being neceſſary to its very exiſtence.

But in God, of whom we ought ever to think and ſpeak with the profoundeſt reverence: In God, I ſay, there is no ſuch diſtinction, or diſtribution of attributes, into eſſential and non-eſſential. In him nothing, whether power, knowledge or goodneſs, or any other quality, is accidental or adventitious, acquired or derived from without." "For who hath "firſt given unto him!" All is eternal, all eſſential, all equally neceſſary: And nothing that is ſo, can ever be loſt. And if God can neither acquire any property or attribute, which did not originally and neceſſarily belong to him as part of his eſſence, nor loſe any thing which did, he is of conſequence, in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, as the ſcriptures expreſs it, "without "variableneſs, or ſhadow of turning;"—wholly and abſolutely, neceſſarily and immutably the ſame, even "from everlaſting to everlaſting." Accordingly, when God is ſpoken of as good, the primary meaning is, that he is ſo in his very nature, or eſſentially good; as neceſſarily & eſſentially good, as he is eternal, wiſe, powerful or omnipreſent: And conſequently, equally good at all times, and in all parts of the univerſe; tho' the appearances, or manifeſtations of his goodneſs are, indeed, very various, as they muſt needs be, if there is a great variety of creatures produced in time, to behold, or to partake of his goodneſs. But of the extent of God's goodneſs hereafter: At preſent it is conſidered only in general, as one of his eſſential attributes, or as a property of his nature, equally underived and unalienable; no borrowed or

precarious excellency, as the goodneſs of men and angels is in them, but as neceſſary as his being. Indeed, One need not ſcruple to call it a *part* of God himſelf, only as there may be an impropriety in *that manner* of expreſſion concerning the *infinite* God, in all other reſpects in general: But it is no doubt *as truly* and *as properly* a *part* of him, as any other divine perfection.

2. The goodneſs of God comprehends his *beneficence*, or his good and bountiful *acts*, as well as the goodneſs of his nature. All beings act, at leaſt in general, according to their reſpective natures, or the qualities inherent in them. And if the great God be ſuppoſed to be eſſentially good, it is hardly, if at all ſuppoſeable, that he ſhould not alſo do good: Tho' to ſay, it was or is neceſſary for him to do it, would be an improper way of ſpeaking; ſince we very ſeldom, if ever, ſpeak of what is done by choice, or with deſign, as done neceſſarily. Be that as it may, ſtill this diſtinction betwixt the goodneſs of God in his nature, or as it is an attribute inherent in him, and his goodneſs as manifeſted in his works or doings, is by no means an inſignificant and unſcriptural one, like many others in common uſe; and more eſpecially with reference to religious ſubjects, where ſuch trifling is the moſt inexcuſeable. "Thou "art good," ſays the royal Pſalmiſt, "and doeſt "good." The ſame diſtinction frequently occurs in the holy ſcriptures. And indeed, what is more natural, than from contemplating goodneſs in its ſource, to deſcend in our thoughts to the apparent effects of it in the works and providence of God? Or, on the other hand, what is more natural, than from conſidering the effects of divine goodneſs and mercy, which we either experience or behold, or rather both, to aſcend in our imaginations to that fountain of goodneſs in the divine nature itſelf, from whence they flow? In

It is by what creatures do, that we form the beſt and ſureſt judgment of their natures, qualities and diſpoſitions reſpectively. For we have not the faculty of looking immediately at the heart or ſpirit, and ſeeing what is therein, as God does, clearly, perfectly, and without the leaſt difficulty: A faculty, however, which ſome orders of creatures above us, may in a degree be poſſeſſed of, tho' not of omniſcience. Nay, we know that God has, on certain occaſions, endowed even men with this faculty. For the "diſcerning "of ſpirits" was one of the miraculous powers conferred on the apoſtles, and, moſt probably, on ſome other chriſtians in the apoſtolic age. But, as was ſaid before, we judge of the internal characters and qualities of other men, chiefly at leaſt by what they do; by their actions and conduct. And this is one way in which we arrive at the knowledge of the divine goodneſs. God "doeth good;" and therefore we juſtly infer that he "is good," even eſſentially ſo. This way of reaſoning is at once concluſive and plain, being accommodated to people of all capacities in general. But I am far from ſaying or thinking, that this is the only method of attaining to the knowledge of God's goodneſs. On the contrary, the divine goodneſs admits of ſtrict demonſtration, a *priori*, to ſpeak in the language of metaphyſicians. And tho' this latter kind of reaſoning & proof, is much leſs adapted to the underſtandings of people in general, than the former; yet it has its uſes, and is really of vaſt importance. Yea, in ſome caſes it is much the beſt, and moſt convincing, to thoſe who are accuſtomed to ſpeculations of this nature. So that tho' it is not ſo proper to be introduced into a common popular diſcourſe, as the other; yet it is by no means to be given up as unſolid, or inconcluſive. Which is what would, to be ſure, highly gratify men of a ſceptical turn; who might flatter themſelves, that if this argument were out of the way, they could find objections

jections enough againſt the viſible, apparent works of God, to diſprove the eſſential goodneſs of his nature, or at leaſt to make others very dubious about it.

The reaſon why I do not mention revelation as a ſtrict, proper proof of the divine goodneſs, is this: That none who believe the ſcriptures pretend to doubt of it, however wrong their conceptions, in ſome reſpects, may be concerning it. And to produce the teſtimony of ſcripture in the caſe, could anſwer no end with thoſe who diſbelieve and deny their authority. It may be added, that whoſoever believes any thing to be true, upon the teſtimony or authority of God ſpeaking in his holy word, preſuppoſes him to be good, and to be before proved ſo, by arguments of another kind. For veracity, or truth, is certainly one branch of goodneſs. If God were not good, he might deceive his creatures, and delight therein. He that ſuppoſes any thing is actually true, merely becauſe God hath declared it, "hath "ſet to his ſeal that God is true." He takes it for granted herein, that God himſelf is a moſt faithful, and therefore a good being; not a falſe or evil One, or One of a juſtly ſuſpected character. For, upon the impious ſuppoſition of his being ſo, who could rely upon—who believe his own word? even tho' the "Lord ſpake face to face unto him, as a man ſpeaketh unto his friend;" and as he is ſaid to have ſpoken to Moſes. *

3. The goodneſs of God, as it is a property of his nature, ſhould always be conſidered as inſeparably connected with his *wiſdom*; and regulated thereby in all its operations. It is not to be conſidered as a ſort of blind inſtinct, or good-nature, detached from reaſon and right, or a regard to fitneſs and propriety. The goodneſs of God is not ſimply a diſpoſition in his

* Exod. XXXIII. II.

his nature to do good, uncontrouled, undirected by wiſdom; ſimilar to what is obſerved in ſome of his creatures in certain inſtances. Infinite wiſdom, or the moſt conſummate, the moſt perfect reaſon, is indiſſolubly connected with goodneſs in the great God: And the former is, undoubtedly, if One may ſo expreſs it, the leading, regulating, and all-directing attribute of his nature; in ſuch ſort, that there are no exertions of mere power, or of mere goodneſs and benevolence in him; but every thing that is done by him, is done according to the immutable rule of wiſdom, or perfect reaſon; of which He himſelf, and only He, is in all caſes an adequate judge. If God be indeed an infinitely knowing, reaſonable, and wiſe being; it is ſurely no preſumption to ſay, and even a duty firmly to believe, that he never, in any caſe whatever, acts unreaſonably, or unwiſely. And if this be the caſe, as, I ſuppoſe, is univerſally acknowledged in words at leaſt, by all profeſſed chriſtians; what was ſaid above, undeniably follows; *viz.* that none of the actions of the great God, are merely and ſolely the exertions either of power or of goodneſs; but all conducted by a wiſdom that cannot err.

It is well for the creatures of God, for the whole creation, that this is the caſe. For, in ſo wide-extended, not to ſay boundleſs an univerſe of things, ſo various and complicated, what might be the conſequence—I ſpeak it with reverence and awe—what might be the conſequence of omnipotence exerting and giving a-looſe to itſelf, without wiſdom to direct its operations! Yea, what might be the conſequence, if goodneſs or benevolence itſelf, accompanied with irreſiſtible power, but not under the conduct of wiſdom, were to exert itſelf in the management of ſo various, extended and complicated a ſyſtem? What diſorders and confuſions? what dreadful conſequences might naturally be expected from

from the exertions of omnipotence without wiſdom, even tho' it were accompanied by ſuch a blind, inſtinctive benevolence as that ſpoken of above? What miſchiefs and miſeries do we often ſee produced in this world, by weak mortal men that mean well, but have little or none of that wiſdom which is "profitable to direct," to regulate their benevolent intentions? How often do very kind parents deſtroy their children, even by their kindneſs itſelf, for want of reaſon and diſcretion proportioned thereto? What prodigious miſchiefs are ſometimes produced, almoſt to the deſtruction of whole countries, kingdoms and mighty empires, by well-intention'd governors, kings and emperors, who really regard the people under them with a paternal affection; but yet want wiſdom adequate to their high ſtations, & the buſineſs of ruling and directing nations? From hence we may in ſome meaſure conjecture, if we are not afraid even to think, what might be the conſequence of boundleſs power, tho' accompanied with univerſal benevolence, but not adequate wiſdom, exerting itſelf at once thro'out the univerſe. The very tho't is ſufficient to fill One with dread and terror!

It may admit of ſome doubt, whether the effects of benevolence thus exerted by an almighty Being deſtitute of wiſdom, might not be near as fatal to the univerſe in the end, as poſitive malevolence, ill-will and cruelty, exerted after the ſame manner. For even in this latter caſe, ſome good might poſſibly be done, contrary to the intention of the doer; as evil would certainly be done contrary thereto, in the former caſe. I do not indeed aſſert, that the miſchiefs produced on the former ſuppoſition, would be equally great with thoſe done in the latter. But, that they muſt needs be very great and terrible, is obvious. What would become of laws, order and, in a word, of good government, without wiſdom to conſtitute them

them at firſt, and to ſupport them afterwards? Every thing of this ſort, on which the good of the univerſe eſſentially depends, muſt ſoon come to an end, if he that rules it were not wiſe, as well as good and powerful: Or, which comes nearly to the ſame thing, if he did not govern wiſely. For there is no material difference, as to the effects and conſequences, in theſe ſuppoſed caſes, betwixt not *having*, and not *exerciſing* wiſdom. What is not uſed, is as nothing: He that has wiſdom, but does not employ it in what he does (tho' this very ſuppoſition ſeems abſurd in itſelf) will act altogether as wrong and irrationally, as if he had none. And a blind man will find his way thro' an unknown country, altogether as well as one that has good eyes, but will not uſe them. We have therefore, as was intimated before, the greateſt reaſon to rejoice, when we reflect that the goodneſs of almighty God, is neceſſarily and immutably connected with unerring wiſdom; always directed thereby in its operations; never exerted without it, and much leſs contrary to it; which it were blaſphemous to ſuppoſe. It is becauſe the Lord of hoſts is ſo "wonderful in counſel," that he is ſo "excellent in working." *

4. The goodneſs of God is what all men are nearly *concerned* and *intereſted* in. It is perhaps, ſtrictly ſpeaking, the moſt amiable of the divine perfections; ſince God may be loved on account of it, without particularly taking his other attributes into conſideration, in a manner in which he cannot be loved for any of the reſt, without the conſideration of this. Even wicked men may think with ſome ſort of pleaſure, on that goodneſs of God which they abuſe; tho' the thought of his other attributes rather miniſters diſquietude and terror to them, than comfort and delight. If it were proper to make any com-

* Iſai. 28. 29.

pariſon betwixt the divine attributes, or to ſay that one of them is more glorious than another, mankind in general, to beſure, would not heſitate much at calling this the moſt glorious. In a relative conſideration of them, this might not, perhaps, be juſtly liable to any exception. Indeed, God himſelf ſeems to allow us to conſider his goodneſs in this view; or as having, with reference to us, a peculiar prehemineence and glory. For divine revelation dwells much longer upon, and treats far more fully and diſtinctly of this attribute of God, and the various manifeſtations thereof in his works and providence, and particularly in the redemption of the world by his Son, than of any of his other perfections, tho' all glorious and adoreable. It is alſo worthy of particular obſervation, as, indeed it has often been remarked, that when Moſes beſought God to manifeſt his glory to him, ſaying, "I beſeech thee, ſhew me thy glory;" the anſwer which he received was, "I will make all "my *goodneſs* paſs before thee, and—will be *gracious* "to whom I will be gracious, and will ſhew *mercy* on "whom I will ſhew mercy." * By which anſwer it is plainly intimated, that the glory of God does in an eminent manner conſiſt in his goodneſs, grace and mercy: So that the prayer of Moſes would be moſt effectually granted, by God's giving him a manifeſtation hereof.

The eternity, immenſity & immutability of God; his infinite knowledge, wiſdom and boundleſs power; his perfect purity, holineſs, and punitive juſtice; tho' all adoreable attributes, yet being conſidered independently of his bounty, clemency and mercy, rather aſtoniſh and confound, than pleaſe or delight us, by appearing amiable to us: Eſpecially when we conſider, not only our own weakneſs, dependence, and abſolute need of continual ſupport and ſuccour from the

* Exod. 33. 18, 19.

the guardian care, and kind providence of God, but our ſinfulneſs and guilt, which at once render us unworthy thereof, & naturally excite diſtruſt, diffidence and fear in us. What conſolation can weak and ſinful creatures draw from a conſideration of thoſe other divine attributes alone, or independently of goodneſs and mercy? They rather inſpire ſuch creatures with terror and amazement, than with comfort, hope and joy. Whereas, being conſidered as inſeparably connected with goodneſs, which is equally eſſential to the divine nature, and exerciſed towards all the works of God; thoſe otherwiſe formidable attributes, are, in a great degree, ſtripped of their terror. And not only ſo, but goodneſs does, if One may ſo expreſs it, communicate its own amiable luſtre & glory to them: So that even we guilty creatures, if penitent, may contemplate *them*, as well as goodneſs itſelf, with delight and joy; as being a firm ſupport to our hope, and ſuch a foundation of ſecurity and happineſs to us, as even the moſt perfect goodneſs could not be without them. The divine goodneſs, therefore, being ſo intereſting a ſubject to us; the ground of all our hopes as to time and eternity, it demands a very particular attention. And let me add, that it would be very *unnatural*, as well as impious in any, to reſtrain, limit or confine it, in a manner not warranted either by reaſon or the holy ſcriptures.*

5. It ſhould be obſerved that the goodneſs of God, when ſpoken of in a general way, comprehends many, if not ſtrictly all of his particular moral attributes: Such, for example, as are diſtinguiſhed by the terms

* It is 10 or 12 Years ſince the Author ſaw the learned Dr. S. Clarke's Sermon on the Goodneſs of God: But, if he miſtakes not, there is a Paſſage in it, of which ſome Things in this Paragraph may appear an imperfect imitation.

mercy, clemency, kindneſs, compaſſion, pity, grace, patience, forbearance, long-ſuffering, and even *juſtice* itſelf. That all theſe, except the laſt-mentioned, are only ſo many different branches or modes of goodneſs, denominated reſpectively with reference to the perſons to whom, or the particular manner and circumſtances in which, God manifeſts that goodneſs to his creatures, which in him is one ſimple, uniform principle: That this is true, I ſay, is very eaſy to ſee; and, indeed, ſo generally allowed, that it ſeems quite needleſs to ſpend time in the proof of it. But there are many perſons, who ſeem to conceive and ſpeak quite differently of the *juſtice* of God; as if it were not a mode or branch of goodneſs, and comprehended therein, but an attribute diſtinct from, if not in a degree repugnant to goodneſs. Theſe different conceptions of the matter, tho' they may at firſt appear immaterial, are yet reſpectively followed by conſequences of a very important nature. I ſhall therefore very briefly explain, and endeavour to eſtabliſh, that ſentiment reſpecting this point, which was hinted above. This I would do at once with all reverence to God, and with all due reſpect to thoſe, who have different conceptions of the matter.

And here it may be obſerved,

(1.) That in a wiſe and good earthly parent, there is really no *ſuch* diſtinction as that which has been mentioned, betwixt goodneſs and juſtice, not even in puniſhing; but the former includes the latter, as being one mode or manner of exerting itſelf, and attaining its end. For example; why does a truly wiſe & good parent, when under the influence, not of mere paſſion and reſentment, but of reaſon only, correct his children, or puniſh them for their faults? Is it not in order to reform, and do them good? —or at leaſt with a view to the benefit of his other children,

children, or thoſe of the houſhold ; that they may be kept under due ſubjection, and reſtrained from the like evil and hurtful practices ? In this caſe, inflicting adequate puniſhment, or ſuch as is adapted to the good ends propoſed, is plainly goodneſs. Tho' it is, and may properly be called juſtice ; yet it is ſo far from being either oppoſite to, or any thing really diſtinct from kindneſs and goodneſs, that the parent would be leſs kind and good than he is, if he did not puniſh. If any parent examines himſelf, upon what principle he corrects his children, he will either find that it is this of goodneſs, or elſe find reaſon to cenſure himſelf as having been actuated therein by ſome impotent, irrational and unjuſtifiable paſſion ; mere cruelty, anger, reſentment, or the like. And, indeed, the frail " fathers of our fleſh," tho' in general kind and good, may yet ſometimes have corrected us thus, " after their own pleaſure," or from a ſudden, tranſient reſentment, rather than with any formal and poſſitive good deſign. In which caſe, they muſt needs cenſure themſelves upon reflexion, as having acted unreaſonably. So that in a good parent, as was ſaid before, there is no ſuch quality as juſtice, really diſtinct from goodneſs ; not even in puniſhing : For it is goodneſs itſelf that gives the blow.

(2.) The caſe is the ſame in civil government. The moſt abſolute ſovereign on earth, ſuppoſing him to be wiſe & good, makes no laws but ſuch as he at leaſt thinks for the benefit of his ſubjects ; whom he alſo conſiders as his children, to be governed by him for their good. Neither does he inflict any puniſhments, but what he conſiders as needful for the ſupport of his government ;— if not for the particular good of thoſe that ſuffer, as in capital caſes, yet for the good of his people in general, by way of example and terror, that good order may be preſerved. So that even

even in this case of excision, or capital punishment, the justice of the sovereign is no real quality in him, distinct from goodness. It is goodness, or a regard to common good, that takes off the head of the traitor, that hangs the robber or murderer, & that "punishes other evil-doers:" Without which, the sovereign would "bear the sword *in vain*;" i. e. would not answer the *good* and *important end* of his bearing it, the preservation of order, public good and happiness. There is not the least color, in this case, for supposing any distinction betwixt goodness and justice in the prince; only as the former is a general principle, which comprehends the latter as one particular mode of it. And the earthly prince, in the sense of all mankind, degenerates into a tyrant, if he punishes his subjects for no better end, than to gratify his own anger and resentment. This leads me to observe,

(3.) That truly wise and good parents and princes, always overlook or *pardon* the faults of their children and subjects respectively, whenever they suppose this may be done, as in some cases it may, consistently both with the good of the offenders themselves, and of others; or both with private and common good. In these cases, what wise and good parent, or sovereign prince of the same character, thinks himself bound in *justice* to punish the transgressor? nay, does not think himself obliged in *reason* to remit the fault, or to shew clemency? Would it not be apparently contrary to true goodness, in these supposed cases, to punish for no good end, either with respect to the delinquent himself or others? Would not this be, to give another pain and sorrow merely for the sake of doing it? And what is this called amongst men, but cruelty? which is in truth contrary both to goodness and justice. It being therefore manifest, that in all wise and good earthly parents and sovereigns, justice even in punishing, is only another

nother name for goodneſs in one particular view, or under a certain modification of it, inſtead of being either oppoſite to, or any thing really diſtinct in nature from goodneſs itſelf: This, I ſay, being evident and undeniable, I proceed to obſerve,

(4.) THAT the great and bleſſed God is pleaſed, in his word, to repreſent himſelf to us very often under the character both of a *Father* and of a *King*. For, "There is One God and *Father* of all, who is "above all, and thro' all, and in you all," ſaith the apoſtle. "We are the *Offspring* of God," ſaith the the ſame apoſtle: And "of *Him* the whole *family* "in heaven and in earth is named."—The title of *King*, is one of his uſual titles in ſcripture. He is called emphatically by our Saviour, "the great *King*." He is ſtiled the "King of heaven," as well as "King "over all the earth." And in my context, the "glo-"ry of his *kingdom*" is ſpoken of; which is an "everlaſting *kingdom*."

(5.) THOUGH the analogy will not hold in all reſpects betwixt an earthly parent or king, and our "Father who is in heaven," or that great "king "eternal, immortal, inviſible, the only wiſe God," who hath "prepared his throne in the heavens;" yet there can be no doubt in general, but that, when theſe titles are given to God in his word, the deſign is, to repreſent him under the character of the *wiſeſt* & *beſt* Father, the *wiſeſt* & *beſt* King; not that of an *unreaſonable*, *unnatural*, and *cruel* parent; not that of an *unwiſe* and *unreaſonable*, a *cruel* and *unmerciful* king. None can doubt of this.

(6.) WE may therefore conclude from hence, That *that* wiſdom and goodneſs, which are very imperfect in the beſt earthly parents and kings, are in perfection in the bleſſed God. And that he governs his

his great family, his univerſal kingdom, according to thoſe general rules and maxims which are in themſelves moſt wiſe and good; ſuch as the *wiſeſt* and *beſt* kings govern by; only, as was intimated before, in an infinitely more perfect manner. From whence, I think, (tho' it doth not become a mortal man to ſpeak confidently in ſuch caſes) that it follows,

(7.) THAT there is not really in the great and glorious God, any *ſuch diſtinction* betwixt goodneſs and juſtice, as has been objected againſt. For if any earthly parent or king ſhould act according to what that diſtinction ſuppoſes, and ſo puniſh his children or ſubjects, not as goodneſs directs, or without a poſitively good and valuable end, ſuch parent or king would be reckoned therein, neither wiſe nor good, nor even juſt, but unreaſonable and cruel. What ground is there then to imagine, that there is any ſuch kind of juſtice in God, diſtinct from, or rather oppoſite to goodneſs? Does reaſon ſuggeſt any ſuch thing? No. Do the holy ſcriptures aſſert or ſuppoſe it? No: nothing like it. There is therefore, great reaſon to think, that this is a diſtinction only of man's making. There can, I think, be no conceivable *fitneſs*, *propriety* or *congruity* in inflicting puniſhment, independently of an *end* to be anſwered thereby. Thoſe terms, when uſed with reference to puniſhing tranſgreſſors, ſuppoſe and refer to ſome end; otherwiſe they are unintelligible. And this end muſt be either poſitively bad, or poſitively good: For what is, in every reſpect, indifferent, can be no end worthy even of human, much leſs of divine wiſdom. And to ſay that the all-wiſe and good God, has a bad or evil end in any thing which he does, were impious indeed! The concluſion from which premiſes, is too obvious to need mentioning.

(8.) THAT

(8.) THAT God, our heavenly Father, chaſteneth and puniſheth his children in this world for their *good*, is evident from numberleſs paſſages in ſcripture. And there is one which deſerves a more particular attention here, on account of the reference therein to the conduct of earthly parents, who ſometimes correct their children only for their own "pleaſure:" Whereas God corrects his for their "profit"—"Whom "the Lord loveth he chaſteneth—We have had fa-"thers of our fleſh, which corrected us, and we gave "them reverence: Shall we not much rather be in "ſubjection unto the Father of ſpirits, and live? For "they verily for a few days chaſtened us *after their* "*own pleaſure*; *but He for our profit*, that we might "be partakers of his holineſs—Afterward it yieldeth "the peaceable fruit of righteouſneſs.*" No Man will deny, but that God is at once juſt and good in theſe chaſtenings. Goodneſs and juſtice in him, therefore, are not to be conſidered as *oppoſites:* They may, in all other caſes without exception, be co-incident; the latter being, perhaps, only a particular modification of the former, and tending to poſitive good, at leaſt the public or common.

(9.) SHALL we?—can we really ſuppoſe, That He who is good to *all*, and whoſe tender mercies are over *all* his works, ever puniſhes his creatures without any good end, either with reſpect to themſelves, or to the other members of his houſhold and kingdom? Would not this be in effect making his creatures miſerable, either for no end at all, or a poſitively bad and evil one? Would not this be, what is always called unreaſonable and cruel amongſt men? To ſay that the infinitely wiſe and good God, puniſhes any of his creatures merely for his own glory, without any regard to the preſervation of order and happineſs, and even contrary to the common good of

 thoſe,

* Heb. 12. 6——12.

thoſe, to whom he was pleaſed to give being, appears to me at beſt very irrational. For what glory could poſſibly redound to any being by acting unreaſonably, or contrary to the dictates of true goodneſs? It is peculiarly abſurd to ſuppoſe that He, who accounts *goodneſs* his *glory*, ſhould aim at advancing it by *ſuch* a conduct!

(10.) The great, bleſſed and glorious God, is indeed an *abſolute Sovereign*: He has an indiſputable right as well as power, to diſpoſe of all his creatures according to his own pleaſure. But it ought not to be inferred from hence, that he is an *arbitrary* being, in that ill ſenſe in which the word arbitrary is uſed reſpecting tyrants; implying that they govern in an unreaſonable, unjuſt and cruel manner. Tho' God is, in the higheſt ſenſe, an abſolute ſovereign; yet in *that* ill ſenſe, he is not certainly an arbitrary Being; and it were blaſphemous to think him ſo. The bleſſed God, tho' omnipotent, tho' over all, and not accountable to any, yet exerciſes no power, no authority, but according to his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs. To act contrary to them, would be to "deny himſelf," and to act contrary to his own glory inſtead of advancing it; which are both impoſſible. So that the great and bleſſed God may, with the ſtricteſt propriety, be ſtiled, A ſovereignly wiſe and good Being. If his power and dominion, on one hand, are without bounds, without limits, his wiſdom and goodneſs are equally unbounded, unlimited, on the other; and no leſs eſſential to him than exiſtence itſelf. And "let him that glorieth," ſaith the moſt High, "glory "in this, that he underſtandeth and knoweth me, "that I am the Lord, which exerciſe *loving-kindneſs*, "*judgment* and *righteouſneſs* in the earth: for in theſe "things *I delight*, ſaith the Lord."*

But

* Jer. IX. 24.

BUT I proceed to conſider more particularly,

II. THE extent and perfection of the divine goodneſs, according to the repreſentation in the text; Wherein it is declared, that "the Lord is good to "ALL," &c. And there are ſeveral obſervations to be made here, preparatory to a diſtinct explanation of theſe words. The firſt is,

1. THAT the creatures and works of God, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, are exceeding *numerous*. How vaſt is the number and variety of them, only in this lower world? How many different ranks and orders of living creatures, excluſive of men, people this earth, air and water, from the mountainous elephant, and enormous whale, down to the mite, too ſmall to be ſeen but by a borrowed microſcopic eye? And how prodigiouſly numerous are the individuals of almoſt every of theſe different ſpecies? But when we raiſe our eyes and imaginations from this comparatively little globe, to the numerous and ſtupendous world above and around us, to whoſe extent in ſpace there are no *apparent* limits, any more than to ſpace itſelf; and when we reaſon analogically from this to thoſe, we may with great probability conclude, that they are alſo peopled by a number and variety of creatures, proportionably greater than are in our own. How aſtoniſhing?—how ſurpaſſing imagination itſelf, then, muſt their variety & number be!—"O Lord, how *manifold* are thy works? in wiſdom haſt thou made them ALL!"—*

2. THE exerciſe of benevolence or goodneſs, in the ſtrict notion of it, ſuppoſes creatures that are at leaſt *ſenſitive* and *perceptive*, tho' they may be irrational. None beſides *ſuch*, are in nature *capable* of enjoying the divine goodneſs, the effects of it, or of having

* Pſal. 104. 24.

having goodneſs and mercy exerciſed towards them. God cannot properly be ſaid to be good or kind to the earth and water, or to mere inanimate, lifeleſs, unperceiving matter.

3. On the other hand you will obſerve, that ALL ſuch creatures as are endowed either with reaſon, or a perceptive faculty only, in how low a degree ſoever, are actually *capable* of happineſs, or agreeable ſenſations. They are therefore naturally capable objects of the divine goodneſs and mercy. I mean, it is ſuppoſeable, or implies no natural impoſſibility, that all ſuch creatures may actually experience the effects of God's beneficence. As to the fact, I do not at preſent concern myſelf with it: But it is manifeſt that the Creator and Lord of all, *may*, without any inconſiſtency or abſurdity, be ſuppoſed actually good to all that are, by the nature which he has given them, rendered capable of participating in the effects of his goodneſs.

4. OF thoſe creatures that are capable of enjoyment or pleaſure, ſome are doubtleſs capable of it in far higher *degrees* than others. Some have apparently, not only quicker ſenſes, but more in number than others. Some are but one little remove from lifeleſs, unſenſed matter: And the capacity for happineſs in all, is probably in proportion to the number and quickneſs of their ſenſes, or perceptive faculties. It ſhould be added here, that all the inhabitants of this earth, men excepted, are apparently incapable of the greateſt & ſublimeſt pleaſures that we know of; thoſe of reflexion, moral virtue, religion, the knowledge and love of God, and hope in him. Theſe are pleaſures of a peculiar kind, belonging only to reaſonable creatures.

5. FROM

5. FROM hence it follows, that tho' all are, in a degree, capable objects of the divine beneficence; yet ſome may be ſo in a far *higher* and more *eminent* ſenſe than others. God may eaſily be conceived actually good to all, & yet not *equally* ſo to all. Or rather, it is evident that he is not ſo; as certain, almoſt, as it is, that he is actually good to any, in any degree.

6. GOD may properly be ſaid to be good and merciful to all thoſe, for whoſe welfare he *provides* according to their reſpective natures and capacities, however inferior. If theſe are upon the whole happy, or if thoſe of an higher order might be ſo, did they not abuſe the divine goodneſs, God is certainly good to them: And this, tho' a degree of pain ſhould attend their enjoyments; yea, tho' an end ſhould be put to the exiſtence of ſome of them ſo ſoon after they began to be, that their term of life would be but as a moment. There is *real* goodneſs and kindneſs ſhewn them, even upon this ſuppoſition, however little: For whatever any enjoy, be it more or leſs, it is from the mere goodneſs of the Creator.

7. IT is ſuppoſeable, that in producing ſuch a wonderful, and almoſt infinite variety of worlds and creatures;—creatures with ſuch different capacities of enjoyment, the infinitely wiſe Author of all, had a view to the general, common good of his creation; and conſequently, that this variety itſelf may contribute thereto. Even we, who are ſo ſhort-ſighted, can in many caſes clearly ſee how variety, due ſubordination of *parts*, &c. actually contribute to the beauty, perfection and real benefit of an *whole*, or what is conſidered as ſuch. May not then, the amazing variety obſerved in the one real *whole*, the UNIVERSE, *poſſibly* tend to the beauty, advantage and perfection thereof? Or muſt we conclude, that becauſe *we* cannot particularly ſee and comprehend all the relations and

and connexions of things thro'out the univerſe, ſo as to perceive how this variety in every inſtance actually contributes to the perfection thereof, therefore HE that made it cannot, or did not deſign it for that end? A preſumptuous concluſion indeed!

8. THERE is poſitive and ſtrong reaſon to think in general, that this is actually the truth: And the manner of reaſoning is ſuch,—ſo plain, that all in general may eaſily perceive the force of it. The argument may be reduced to a very few words, thus:—This variety was not *undeſigned*, or produced for *no end*. Nor can it be ſuppoſed an *indifferent* thing in itſelf, whether it ſhould be, or not: No man of the leaſt reflexion can imagine ſo. If then, it was neither *undeſigned*, nor a matter of *indifference* in its own nature, it muſt have been intended either for a poſitively *wiſe* and *good*, or a poſitively *unreaſonable* and *malevolent* end. There is no medium; this is the dilemma. To ſay the *latter*, is nothing ſhort of a blaſphemous imputation of folly and malevolence to the Creator. The *former* therefore, is even demonſtratively the truth; *viz.* That this almoſt infinite variety amongſt the creatures of God, was deſigned by him for, and therefore actually tends to, the ornament, perfection and real good of the univerſe.—"And God ſaw *every* "thing that he had made, and behold, it was *very* "*good*;" ſuperlatively, perfectly good.

9. THIS variety, order, & particular arrangement of the creatures and works of God, being ſuppoſed in the whole "very good;" all ſuch queſtions as theſe, Why one was not made another? Why men were made men, rather than brutes or angels? Or angels, angels, rather than either of the other? Why birds were not made beaſts, & beaſts birds; & fiſhes were made fiſhes, inſtead of beaſts or fowles? Why the loweſt individual of the loweſt ſpecies, was not made

made the higheſt of the higheſt ; and *vice verſâ*, the higheſt, not the loweſt ?—All ſuch queries, I ſay, carry their own futility & ſelf-repugnance in their very face. They imply a plain contradiction, as much as it would be to aſk, Why Noah's dove was not originally made the ocean, the moon or a comet ? Or, Why the ſun that now lightens the heavens, was not made a glow-worm ?—Is it not plainly *impoſſible*, that a *dove* ſhould have been an *ocean*, a *moon* or *comet* ; or the *ſun* a *glow-worm !* And is it not equally impoſſible, that men ſhould have been angels, or angels men, &c ? There is, therefore, as much folly as impiety, in " the " thing formed ſaying to Him that formed it, Why " haſt thou made ME thus ?"

10. ALTHOUGH ſuch creatures as are in their natures capable of pleaſure, are alone capable *objects* of the divine beneficence, ſtrictly ſpeaking ; yet the goodneſs of God may be made manifeſt *in* and *by* all his *other works* in general ;—tho' inanimate and ſenſeleſs. Thus the earth, the ſea and this lower air, with all that is therein, may ſerve to manifeſt the goodneſs and mercy of the Creator, while the heavens declare his glory.

THESE things being premiſed, we may now proceed to a more particular conſideration of the text. And the doctrine of the inſpired Pſalmiſt here, comprehends the following particulars ; *viz.*

FIRST, That the Lord of all is actually good and kind to all the different *ranks*, *orders* or *ſpecies* of his intelligent and ſenſitive creatures ; all the ſpecies that are capable of happineſs, in whatever degree.

SECONDLY, That he is likewiſe good and kind to *all* the *individuals* of which theſe ſpecies conſiſt.

THIRDLY,

THIRDLY, That all his *other works* in general, tho' incapable of *enjoying* his goodneſs and mercy, or the effects of them, yet ſerve for the *manifeſtation* thereof. And,

FOURTHLY, That God is therefore an *abſolutely*, a *perfectly* good and merciful Being, or good in the higheſt conceiveable ſenſe.

THESE propoſitions are very fairly contained in the general doctrine, or aſſertion of the text; That "the "Lord is good to ALL, and his tender mercies OVER "ALL his works." Accordingly, I propoſe to conſider and illuſtrate theſe points, rather as being the expreſs doctrine of *revelation*, and to be believed on the authority *thereof*, than as things which are demonſtrable by *natural reaſon*, *obſervation* and *experience*. For tho' this is in general a moſt rational doctrine, for the proof whereof, arguments of the latter kind are not wanting, ſome of which may be briefly hinted at; yet a proper diſcuſſion of it in this way, would require many diſcourſes, and ſuch a kind of reaſoning alſo, as is not ſo convenient for the pulpit.

To return then:

FIRST, The Lord of all is actually good and kind to all the different *ranks*, *orders* or *ſpecies* of his intelligent and ſenſitive creatures; all the ſpecies that are capable of happineſs, in whatever degree. That God is good to angels, is doubted by none; and, that he is good and merciful to mankind, is, in words, allowed by all. The principal deſign of the holy ſcriptures, is indeed to ſhew the "riches of his goodneſs" to the children of men; eſpecially in their redemption by his Son. He is good to the beaſts of the field and foreſt, to the fowles of the air, to the fiſh of the ſea, to all the ſpecies of reptiles, to every kind

kind of inſects, the moſt inferior not excepted; ſuch as ſhun the naked eye. All theſe he upholds in the being which he gave. He preſerves the reſpective orders diſtinct, from age to age. He makes ſutable proviſion for them all, and opens to them his ſtores. The holy ſcriptures, particularly the book of Job, of Pſalms, and the writings of Solomon, abound with reflexions upon the proviſion which the Author of nature has made, for the ſubſiſtence and comfort of the animal and ſenſitive creation. The 104th Pſalm, which is a pretty long one, is chiefly taken up with reflexions of this kind. The beaſts, fowles and fiſhes are particularly mentioned as the objects of God's providential care: "Theſe wait all upon "thee," ſays the Pſalmiſt, "that thou mayeſt give "them their meat in due ſeaſon—Thou openeſt thine "hand, they are filled with good."* So in my context (ver. 15 and 16.) "The eyes of all wait upon "thee, and thou giveſt them their meat in due ſea-"ſon. Thou openeſt thine hand, and ſatisfieſt *the* "*deſire of* every living thing." Many ſorts of beaſts, fiſh and fowle, and even more inſignificant creatures are particularly inſtanced in, in the holy ſcriptures, as examples of God's univerſal care, & objects of his kindneſs: Whales, oxen, ſheep, horſes, the oſtritch, ſtork, &c. And our Saviour himſelf diſdains not to ſpeak more than once, of the goodneſs of God to "ravens" and "ſparrows."

If there are other planets or worlds inhabited, we may be certain that God takes a ſimilar care of the various orders of creatures in them, anſwerable to their reſpective natures and wants. It were highly irrational to ſuppoſe, that He has made any one ſpecies of creatures, capable of ſenſation in any degree, and then neglected it as below his providential care. All kinds of living creatures that we know of, mani-

* Pſal. 104. 27, 28.

feſt the wonderful wiſdom of the Creator in their frame and ſtructure. And if he thought proper to exerciſe ſuch a truly divine art in the formation of them, ſurely he would not leave them unprovided for, and ſo, to unavoidable miſery, when formed. Nothing, no ſpecies, ſurely, which God has created, is too inſignificant for God to take care of. And how could it be ſaid with any propriety, that his tender mercies are over *all his works*, if any one whole ſpecies were neglected and abandoned by him ?

But is it only the various ſpecies, that God is good and kind to ?—not the particulars of which they conſiſt ? That would be ſtrange indeed ! And this brings us to the ſecond thing implied in the text ; *viz.*

Secondly, That God is likewiſe good and kind to all the *individuals* of which theſe ſpecies conſiſt. Every *whole* being made up of parts, and every ſpecies conſiſting of individuals only ; it is not very eaſy for *common ſenſe* to conceive how an whole, or a ſpecies can be kindly provided for by the God of all, as ſome have ſuppoſed,* and yet the parts, the individuals, be diſregarded & neglected by him. Is God the maker of the ſpecies only, not of the individuals ? That were a very myſterious poſition ; a curious diſcovery to match the other ! Indeed, they muſt needs go together. For if God is ſuppoſed to be the maker of the individuals, it follows as undeniably from hence, that he will take care of individuals, as it does from his creating the ſpecies, that he take care of the ſpecies. The reaſoning that will hold with reſpect to one, will hold equally with reſpect to the other : If it fails in one, it will fail in the other alſo. And, as was hinted before, if individuals are neglected or overlooked, it is plain that the ſpecies themſevlves are not provided for, unleſs the ſpecies can be

* Ld. *Bolinbroke*, &c.

be preſerved, when all the individuals are left to periſh! A providential care of the ſpecies, evidently involves the like care of the individuals thereof; at leaſt of ſome of them. And if God takes care of ſome, why not of all? Is this too laborious a taſk for Him that is at once omnipreſent, omniſcient and omnipotent?

But how can God be ſaid to be good to *all?*—how could it be affirmed, that his tender mercies are over *all* his works, if there were ſome of his creatures, his works, originally unprovided for? To ſay that this means only all the ſpecies of creatures, but not the individuals, is taking an unnatural and unwarrantable liberty with the holy ſcriptures, beſides the abſurdity of the very ſuppoſition itſelf, and the ſetting of bounds and limits to the divine goodneſs. Nay, would not this be to ſuppoſe God poſitively cruel to ſome of his creatures? There is no medium betwixt his being actually kind and merciful to all, and his being poſitively cruel and unmerciful to ſome. For, pleaſe to conſider, that when God makes creatures capable of happineſs and miſery, in whatever degree; if he does not alſo make proviſion for their comfortable ſubſiſtence, and take a kind care of them, he of conſequence dooms them to inevitable pain and miſery, even without any fault of theirs; ſince if a creature is actually made, and preſerved in a ſtate of ſenſibility, it muſt be either in a degree of pleaſure or pain. If it be not the former, it muſt of courſe be the latter. And, upon the preſent ſuppoſition, this is wholly owing to God's not making that proviſion for the creature, which was abſolutely neceſſary for its well-being, according to the nature given it by himſelf. Now, let ſome very acute diſtinguiſher ſhew the difference betwixt this and poſitive cruelty: It would be in vain for an ordinary genius to attempt it. And when any One has fairly made out

this diſtinction, he will probably be able to reconcile ſuch a conduct in the Creator, with the expreſs doctrine of ſcripture, that he "*ſatisfieth* the deſire of *every living thing*." But

It will perhaps be ſaid, that the univerſal terms *all*, *every*, and the like, are ſometimes uſed in a reſtrained, limited ſenſe: And that there are plain reaſons for, and an abſolute neceſſity of, underſtanding them in this limited ſenſe in many places of ſcripture. This is granted: But then, they ought never to be thus limited, but underſtood in their proper, natural and unconfined ſenſe, unleſs there is poſitive reaſon, or ſome real neceſſity for ſuch a limitation of them. Let any One who thinks it reaſonable and neceſſary *to limit the goodneſs and mercy of his Creator*, ſhew it to be actually ſo, and I will then acknowledge the reaſonableneſs and neceſſity of limiting the ſignification of thoſe univerſal terms, in which he is declared to be good and merciful to *all*, to *every* living thing. For unleſs you can prove the former, it is impoſſible you ſhould ever be able to prove the latter. Limiting the ſenſe of theſe terms in the preſent caſe, is plainly limiting and ſetting bounds to that goodneſs, which is declared in and by them to be unlimited in its extent. Neither will any man, who really believes God to be good to *all*, ever deſire to find out any reaſon for putting a reſtrained ſenſe upon the term *all* in the text.

But let us, for a few minutes, take it for granted that *all*, here, does not literally mean all, or every individual; but that there are ſome individuals of every ſpecies, to which God is NOT good;—ſome of his works, over which his mercy is NOT extended. How *many* then, of each ſpecies, ſhall we ſuppoſe in this ſituation;—thus forgotten or neglected by him that made them?

Let

Let us, for example, ſuppoſe one *half* of every ſpecies, thus abandoned by the "God and Father of all." I aſk then, Whether all theſe individuals, to which God is not good and merciful, muſt not inevitably be wretched; each of them being left deſtitute of a proper ſupply to its natural wants? No One can doubt of this. All, for whoſe well-being God makes no proviſion, muſt of courſe be miſerable: For who beſides Him can provide for them? I aſk, in the next place, Whether this ſuppoſition is conſiſtent with the ſpirit, and manifeſt deſign of the text, even tho' the term *all*, twice uſed therein, did not literally intend every individual? I aſk, in the next place, Whether the ſuppoſition, that one *half* of every ſpecies are thus abandoned to unavoidable miſery by their Creator, is conſiſtent with his acknowledged *general character*, as a good and merciful Being? Is not this ſuppoſition highly, and very obviouſly repugnant to *that* character; and therefore, to the honor of God? It may be again demanded, Whether they who think this to be the truth (if any ſuch there are) do not, in effect, unite in their imaginations the two independent and oppoſite principles of the Manichæans, the one good, the other evil, into one ſelf-contradictory being, whom they call, and whom they worſhip under the name of, the "One God and Father of all!"—Let me aſk once more, Whether this ſuppoſition of one *half* of every ſpecies thus abandoned, be not a very *moderate* and *modeſt* ſuppoſition, according to the repreſentations which ſome perſons have given of God's conduct towards one of the moſt *conſiderable* ſpecies that we have any particular knowledge of?

But you will allow, perhaps, that the ſuppoſition of one *half*, is too large; that it is not agreeable to the text, to reaſon, or to the general idea of God as a good, kind and merciful being—"*Half* is, indeed, too many, and ſhocks the mind at once!"—I underſtand you well. Inſtead of ſaying one *half* then, we will

ſay

ſay only, one *quarter*. Will this ſuppoſition ſtand the teſt ? What ! One *quarter* part of every ſpecies, both of ſenſitive and rational creatures, abandoned thus to inevitable miſery by their Creator ; and yet this ſame Creator declared in his own holy word, to be good to all !—A *quarter* of all God's creatures of every kind and order, are a great many, ſurely, to be thus caſt off and forſaken by Him, whoſe tender mercies are ſaid to be over all his works !—If you conſider, and recollect yourſelves, I believe you will think the number ſtill ſomewhat *too large*—What ! a *quarter* part of the whole ! But if you will not yet give this up, let me vary the language of the text a little, and paraphraſe it ſo as preciſely to expreſs your ſenſe of it, thus—" The Lord is good to *three quarters* of his " creatures, and his tender mercies are over *three* " *quarters* of all his works : But to the other *quarter* " he is not good, kind or merciful ; but leaves them " to unavoidable miſery and deſtruction."—Will you allow this to be a natural praraphraſe, or to give the genuine ſenſe of the text ?—" No : it *ſounds* harſhly ; " and ſeems too much to limit the divine goodneſs."

Well then, let us ſuppoſe only a tenth, twentieth, fiftieth, hundredth, or, to cut the matter ſtill ſhorter, only one *thouſandth* part of the whole rational and ſenſitive creation, doomed to inevitable miſery in the manner before expreſſed—Will you abide by this ? Will you abate nothing of it ?—When you conſider the innumerable millions of creatures, many of them rational ones, that muſt, even on this ſuppoſition, be wretched, does it ſit eaſy upon your minds ?--Is not the number, in the whole, too large ſtill ?—A *thouſandth* part of all, of every ſpecies, in all worlds ;—probably enough to people thouſands of ſuch worlds as this !—How can that be ; and yet God be an exceeding good, kind and merciful being ? I am perſwaded that, upon reflexion, you will not ſtand to this.

Suppose

SUPPOSE then, but ten individuals, or five, nay, two only of every ſpecies, nay, but *one*; yet theſe muſt amount to a vaſt number. For the number of the ſpecies even in this little globe, is great; how prodigious then, muſt it probably be in all worlds taken collectively? And will not one individual of each of them, amount in the whole to too great a number to be thus doomed to unavoidable miſery, by Him who gave them being? Is even this conſiſtent with his acknowledged general character as a good and merciful Being? If you think ſoberly and impartially, you will chuſe rather to leſſen the number ſtill, than to defend this ſuppoſition.

WELL then, ſuppoſe but a ſingle individual of one ſpecies—Only let that be a reaſonable creature, capable by nature of knowing and enjoying God eternally, whom he never diſpleaſed by any act of his!—No—It ſhall be but an irrational creature, and that of the very loweſt, the moſt inferior ſpecies, that is thus doomed to all the pain which it is in its nature capable of enduring.—And can you ſeriouſly think that the Creator and "Father of all," has pitched upon this poor mite, to make the exiſtence which himſelf gave, wretched! Why? ſin it could not: And is it agreeable to wiſdom, goodneſs and mercy, to make an *innocent* creature miſerable thro' the whole term of its exiſtence, whether longer or ſhorter?—If you are reſolved to defend even this loweſt of all ſuppoſitions which the nature of the queſtion admits, you ſhould, I think, paraphraſe the text thus—"The "Lord is good to all *but one*, and his tender mercies "are over all his works, *excepting* a *ſingle* inſignificant "creature, which either eſcapes his notice, or at "which he is angry, and ſo makes it miſerable, tho' "it neither has, nor is capable of offending Him." How do you like this paraphraſe? You muſt needs adopt one to this purpoſe, if you oppoſe what I am endeavouring

endeavouring to eſtabliſh ;—the univerſal goodneſs and mercy of God, in the higheſt and moſt literal ſenſe of the terms "all," and "every living thing," uſed in ſcripture with expreſs reference to the extent of his goodneſs.

Our Lord Jeſus Chriſt ſpeaking of thoſe *ſparrows*, "five of which were ſold for two farthings," ſays that "*not one* of them is forgotten before God."* This may doubtleſs be ſaid with equal truth, even of creatures inferior to ſparrows. And One need not ſcruple to ſay, that the ſuppoſition of any of them being forgotten, forſaken and abandoned by him, in the ſenſe ſo often mentioned, is diſhonourable to God ; an unworthy imputation upon his wiſdom, goodneſs, mercy, & his providential care reſpecting a creature which he thought proper to call into exiſtence. So that tho' ſome things and creatures, of which I have been ſpeaking, are in one view, indeed, very inconſiderable ; yet the end purſued all along is of the laſt importance. But if it would be diſhonourable to God, to charge him with treating only one of the moſt inferior of his creatures in ſuch a manner, what ſhall we think of that doctrine, which repreſents him as treating *millions* of *millions* of his rational creatures after the ſame manner !—or rather, after a manner almoſt infinitely harder to be reconciled with wiſdom, goodneſs and mercy !—I will not ſay, what ought to be thought of it ; but leave it to your calm and ſerious reflexions. To proceed,

Thirdly, All God's *other works* in general, tho' incapable of *enjoying* his goodneſs and mercy, or the effects of them, yet ſerve for the *manifeſtation* thereof. In agreement hereto, by thoſe words, "all his works," we may fairly underſtand, not only his reaſonable and ſenſitive creatures, but all his other works without

* Luke 12. 6.

without exception. As if it had been ſaid, that God is not only kind to all his creatures that are capable objects of his kindneſs, but hath left the veſtiges, the marks, and plain indications of his goodneſs, even of his tender mercies, impreſſed upon all parts of the creation; all things being adapted to anſwer benevolent purpoſes reſpecting the creatures that are capable of enjoying good. This is no harſh conſtruction of the words: But whether it is juſt or not, in point of criticiſm, it is undoubtedly true; and this ſentiment correſponds to what is declared in many other places of ſcripture. "God ſaw *every thing* that he had made; and behold, it was *very good.*" *All* his works are, accordingly, ſaid to be made by him in *wiſdom*, to *praiſe him*, and the like. Such paſſages muſt be ſuppoſed to have ſome reference to the goodneſs of God's inanimate works, conſidered with relation to his reaſonable & ſenſitive creatures, to whoſe pleaſure and uſe they are adapted; either by affording ſubſiſtence to them, or pleaſing the eye, ear and imagination; or being really beneficial in ſome other reſpect. It is not eaſiy to conceive, why they ſhould be called "very good," or ſaid to "praiſe him," but upon the ſuppoſition of their being wiſely and kindly adapted to afford ſubſiſtence, pleaſure and delight to creatures capable of enjoyment.

It is indeed evident to ſenſe and reaſon, that the *whole* viſible creation is the work of a good and merciful Being, not merely of a moſt intelligent & powerful One. The ſtructure, the admirable order and adjuſtment of the various parts, nothing ſuperfluous, nothing wanting, from whence reſults the harmony and beauty of the whole, prove the former as certainly as they do the latter; loudly proclaiming at once the power, wiſdom and goodneſs of the adorable Creator. The air, heavens, earth and ſea, beſides affording habitation and ſubſiſtence to ſo many

millions of other creatures, are all adapted in ſome degree at leaſt, to the uſe and delight of man in particular. Here are hamony to raviſh his ear, beauty to feaſt his eye, grateful odors to regale his noſe, delicious fruits, liquors, &c. to gratify almoſt all his ſenſes at once. So that ample proviſion is made, not only for his neceſſary ſupport, but his pleaſure and delight alſo, within the bounds of reaſon, or a virtuous moderation. And if nature, or rather its Author, ſends diſeaſes, he alſo ſends remedies: Nor are there fewer antidotes than poiſons in the natural world; tho' there is, indeed, now no "tree of life" to be ſeen therein, of which we may "eat, and live forever" here. But "wiſdom is a tree of life to them "that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one "that retaineth her;"—even *immortally* happy thro' the ſecond ADAM, the Lord from heaven, who hath "aboliſhed death, and brought life and immortality "to light thro' the goſpel."—But not to digreſs.—There is no one ſenſe, natural appetite or want, either in man, or in the other inferior inhabitants of the earth, but the beneficent Author of all, has made proviſion for the regular gratification and ſupply thereof. Every viſible object in the natural world, has a beneficent end; if not with relation to man, yet with reſpect to the other creatures; not one of which is below the care of, or "forgotten before God." Even the extended barren ſands and deſerts in ſome parts of the earth, the equally barren rocks & promontories in others, and the inacceſſible precipices, mountains and wilderneſſes in others, have their good and merciful ends, or uſes. They ſerve at leaſt for ſhelter, and a ſecure retreat to the fowles of heaven, where they may hatch and nurſe their young: And alſo for four-footed beaſts, and creeping things, leſt their ſpecies ſhould, perhaps, be otherwiſe deſtroyed by MAN, that "mighty hunter before the Lord."

THE

THE benevolent uſes and ends of almoſt all parts of the viſible creation, are very obvious. And as to thoſe particular things, the final cauſes, or good ends whereof lie leſs open to common view; the more attentively they are examined, and the better underſtood, the more clearly do they manifeſt both the wiſdom and goodneſs of God; ſhewing that the "earth is (indeed) *full* of his riches," while the heavens proclaim his glory. In which view particularly, the writings of King David, Solomon, and many other men of philoſophic, comtemplative minds, are of ſingular advantage, and redound greatly to the honor of God. "The works of the Lord are great, "ſought out of all thoſe that have pleaſure therein. "His work is honourable and glorious, and his "RIGHTEOUSNESS endureth for ever. He hath "made his wonderful works to be remembered." * The works of God, as has been intimated before, are honourable, and declare his glory more eſpecially, conſidered as "good," and as having his "tender mercies" manifeſted in and by them. Yea, it may be queſtioned whether they are truly glorious at all, conſidered merely as the effects of great knowledge and power, or without any relation to benevolent ends. Certainly, no One could think the works of a malevolent or unmerciful being, tended to his praiſe and honor, whatever art, contrivance and power appeared in them. This art, contrivance and power, being applied to evil and malicious purpoſes, would be rather a proper ground for reproaches and execrations, than for ſuch praiſe and glory as are juſtly due to the ever-bleſſed God, who is good to all, and whoſe tender mercies are "over all his works."

FOURTHLY, God is therefore an *abſolutely*, a *perfectly* good and merciful Being; or good in the higheſt conceivable ſenſe. This follows evidently from

* Pſalm III,

the text, and what has been discourſed upon it. According to this character of him and his works, goodneſs and mercy are the moſt pre-eminent, the moſt diſtinguſhed attributes of God: For his unſearchable wiſdom and infinite power, if One may ſo expreſs it, are but the *miniſters* of his infinite goodneſs, being wholly employed to accompliſh his good and gracious purpoſes reſpecting his creatures. Accordingly, the conſtruction which ſome learned men have put upon the latter part of the text, is this, that God's tender mercies are *above* all his other works, or the moſt conſpicuous, great & excellent. However the critics may ſettle this point, ſtill the important concluſion is equally obvious and certain; That God is abſolutely, univerſally and perfectly good. It is accordingly ſaid of him, by One that came down from heaven to declare and make him known to the inhabitants of the earth, that there is "none good but ONE, that is GOD." Agreeably whereto St. John ſays, "God is LOVE:" Words which expreſs, in the ſtrongeſt and moſt emphatical manner, his eſſential, boundleſs and perfect goodneſs. And it is worthy of particular remark, that tho' God is infinitely wiſe and powerful, &c. as well as good, yet he is never ſtiled in ſcripture, *wiſdom* or *power* in the abſtract, as he is here ſtiled LOVE. Perfect goodneſs, love itſelf, is his very eſſence, in a peculiar ſenſe; immeaſurable, immutable, univerſal and everlaſting LOVE. And nothing that is in any manner or degree inconſiſtent with ſuch love, has any place in God: For "God is light, and in him there is *no darkneſs* at all."*

To me it ſeems at once impious and abſurd, as involving a contradiction, to ſuppoſe that we can even conceive, or have any idea of, a goodneſs and mercy more conſummate, more perfect than any which *actually exiſts* in nature, or the God of nature. From whence

* 1 John I. 5.

whence ſhould this idea, this conception of abſolute, perfect and unchangeable goodneſs come? Or how could we have it, any more than theſe of unbounded ſpace, and of time without beginning, i. e. of immenſity and eternity, if there were in nature no ſuch thing? In theſe caſes, there doubtleſs is, and muſt be, ſomething which anſwers to the ideas; at leaſt, our mental conceptions, the copies, cannot ſurpaſs and exceed, cannot be greater or more perfect than any *exiſting original.*

God being ſuppoſed all-knowing, independent and almighty, the abſolute perfection of his goodneſs may be deduced from hence, together with all moral qualities in the higheſt poſſible degree. Such a Being muſt know what is *in itſelf good*, as an End, *viz. happineſs*; and alſo know whatever is right and reaſonable, excellent and glorious: Which may all be comprehended in *doing good.* He muſt alſo know all the poſſible means, or ways of doing it; and, which are the beſt, propereſt, and moſt effectual; ſo as to be ſubject to no miſtake or error. Moreover; being independent and all-powerful, he cannot be under any *wrong* bias, or have any *difficulties* to diſcourage him in purſuing what is right;—any end truly great, noble and excellent. From theſe premiſes, which I do but hint at, it follows undeniably, that ſuch an all-knowing, independent and infinitely powerful being, muſt alſo be infinitely, perfectly good. The fitneſs and reaſonableneſs of being ſo, would undoubtedly *determine him to be ſo.* By which laſt expreſſion, I am far from deſigning to ſuggeſt, either that there was a time when God was not good, or that he might poſſibly have been otherwiſe. I mean the direct contrary in both reſpects, *viz.* that as this fitneſs was eternally ſeen, God was eternally good; and as he ſaw it neceſſarily, he was as neceſſarily good; and yet not contrary to his own will or choice, which were a contradiction; but

but in conformity thereto, even from eternity. For nothing was prior, not even the exiſtence of God, to his will to be good ; or, in other words, to his goodneſs : For theſe are the ſame thing in the ever-glorious God.

Besides : If God is allowed to be *now* good in *any degree*, it will from hence follow demonſtrably, that he is eternally and neceſſarily, univerſally and perfectly ſo ; eſſentially and equally good in all times & places. Nothing is *now* a property in God, which was not ſo from eternity. If he had ever been deſtitute of goodneſs, whence ſhould it be derived to him ? He muſt have eternally remained deſtitute of it, unleſs you ſuppoſe ſome other being greater and better than Him, " of whom are all things," to communicate an excellency to him, which he originally wanted in himſelf !—God was, therefore, both eternally and independently good. And if ſo, then neceſſarily. For there was not a proſſibility of that which is eternal, underived and independent, being otherwiſe than it is. The ſuppoſition that it might have been otherwiſe, would involve the abſurdity of ſuppoſing ſomething prior to eternity, able to make it otherwiſe : So that it would be, ſtrictly, neither eternal nor independent, tho' it is ſuppoſed to be both. God is therefore eternally, independently and neceſſarily good, at leaſt in *ſome degree*. And if in any degree, then abſolutely, infinitely and perfectly good. For whatever is neceſſary in God, is eſſential to him, or a part of his very nature : And God being himſelf infinite, or unlimited, all his properties or attributes muſt be ſo likewiſe ; ſince it would be a repugnancy, to ſuppoſe finite and limited eſſential qualities in a Being, who is himſelf neceſſarily infinite. God is then, not only eternally, neceſſarily and eſſentially, but infinitely or perfectly good. And if ſo, then equally, univerſally and immutably good in all times and places. For it

it were a contradiction to ſuppoſe what is eternal, neceſſary, eſſential, infinite and perfect in God, to be various or changeable;—different in one *time* or *place*, from what it is in all *others*. Such variety, ſuch mutability and changeableneſs, are demonſtrations of a temporary, precarious, dependent, unneceſſary, finite and imperfect nature.—Thus it follows from God's being *now* in any degree good, that he is eternally, neceſſarily, eſſentially, univerſally, perfectly, invariably and immutably good.

THAT the *appearances*, or *manifeſtations* of divine goodneſs, are various and manifold in different times and places, is not the leaſt objection againſt the abſolute perfection and *ſameneſs* of that goodneſs itſelf, in all others. This is no more than the natural, neceſſary conſequence of perfect goodneſs, in calling ſuch a wonderful variety of creatures into exiſtence; who, if they exiſt at all, muſt exiſt in certain particular times and places. And the external manifeſtations of God's goodneſs, muſt be juſt as various as the creatures which he has made to partake of it. Which latter variety among the creatures being poſitively good, right and beſt, the former variety in the appearances of goodneſs, are ſo likewiſe; inſtead of being any ſort of objection againſt the univerſality, perfection or unchangeableneſs thereof. The manifeſtations of divine *power* and *wiſdom*, are alſo different in different times and places. And yet no one is ſo abſurd as to infer from hence, that God is not eſſentially and equally, perfectly and invariably wiſe and powerful in all others: Tho' the inference would be altogether as juſtly drawn in the latter caſes, as in the former: Or rather, in both it would be wholly groundleſs and irrational.

LEAVING the particular objections that were to be taken notice of, and the propoſed reflexions upon

on this ſubject to the afternoon ; I ſhall beg leave to conclude this diſcourſe with two or three ſhort remarks. And,

1. THOUGH it is demonſtrably certain upon principles reaſon, thatGod is perfectly good and merciful; yet, whatever ſinful creatures might imagine, they could not, without an expreſs revelation from heaven, know that God would certainly pardon their ſins on repentance. This might ſeem probable ; but it could not be intirely depended on, to the excluſion of doubt, and all juſt cauſe for uneaſy apprehenſions. The reaſon is, that *punitive juſtice* is a branch of goodneſs, in ſuch ſort that a perfectly good and merciful being may in *many* caſes be obliged to puniſh tranſgreſſors, in purſuance of his general benevolent deſigns towards his creatures ; for the ſupport of order, right, &c. on which the common good eſſentially depends. And how ſhould a vicious man, eſpecially One who has been ſo to a great degree, know, upon principles of reaſon only, that he is not himſelf One of thoſe whom it is, in this view, neceſſary for an infinitely wiſe and good God to puniſh, for a terror and warning to others ? None butGod himſelf,who knoweth all things, certainly knoweth who may, or may not be pardoned, conſiſtently with the eternal rule of right, of wiſdom and goodneſs ; and under what particular circumſtances. The light of nature leaves us *more* at a loſs reſpecting this matter, than his own reaſon leaves a common mechanic, (who is quite ignorant about affairs of ſtate and policy) whether his Prince ſhould, in purſuance of the public good, pardon a rebel, or ſtrike off his head. A man may, indeed, very probably leap to this comfortable concluſion, that he himſelf is One of thoſe who may, and certainly ſhall be, forgiven of God. Pride, ſelf-love and mere vanity, may buoy up his hopes, and preſerve him from any great concern about

about futurity. But if he goes no faſter nor farther than reaſon, or the light of nature actually leads him, he muſt at beſt be left (like an half-founder'd veſſel) to be toſſed upon the billows of anxious doubt and uncertainty, if not to ſink into the abyſs of an horrible deſpair !

2. ONE principal end of Jeſus Chriſt's coming into this apoſtate world, was to proclaim the glad tidings of pardon and eternal life to ſinners, as the free gift of God thro' his mediation ; particularly thro' the atonement to be made by his blood, when he ſhould "offer himſelf up to God, as a lamb without blemiſh and without ſpot" : Thereby ſupporting the honour of God's violated commandments, and the dignity of his government ; in ſuch ſort, that guilty creatures might receive the forgiveneſs of ſins and eternal life, in a way the moſt agreeable to infinite wiſdom ; and therefore really more agreeable to infinite goodneſs and mercy alſo, than if they had been pardoned and ſaved without any intervening ſacrifice for ſin. Thus, by the chriſtian revelation,— a light indeed from heaven, ſinful men are delivered from that ſtate of darkneſs and perplexity reſpecting pardon and a future ſtate, in which the mere light of nature actually leaves them. In this diſpenſation of grace, the goodneſs of God to, and his tender mercies over the ſinful children of men, are moſt clearly and glorioufly manifeſted. It is both a faithful ſaying, my brethren, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jeſus Chriſt came into the world to ſave even the chief of ſinners. Take heed therefore, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain ; for he is not willing that "ANY ſhould periſh, but that ALL ſhould come to repentance."

3. It is greatly to be lamented, that this gospel of the kingdom,—the glad tidings of great joy to all people; so full of heavenly peace, comfort and hope, and such a wonderful manifestation of the love of God to mankind: It is much to be lamented, I say, that this "glorious gospel of the blessed God," should be so perverted by many; so restrained as to the number of those, for whose salvation it was designed; so narrowed, so clogged with needless difficulties and unscriptural mysteries, by dark systems of divinity produced in dark and corrupt ages, as to become rather an engine for disturbing truly pious and good christians with doubts and fears, than to be an adequate relief to awakened sinners, by really manifesting the riches of God's goodness to a guilty world in its proper extent, thro' Him that "gave "himself a RANSOM FOR ALL, to be testified in due "time."* And I seriously declare, that if I were to form my conceptions of God's moral character, by such discourses as I have sometimes heard and read, and such as were, by many, thought to be truly *evangelical*; instead of thinking Him really "good to ALL, and his tender mercies over ALL his works;"—essentially good, and infinitely the best of Beings, I could not but conclude Him to be *infinitely* more *unjust* and *cruel*, than any other being in the universe!

To conclude: It is to hoped that the blessed God, the Father of all, has no children here before him, so depraved as to suspect that I have extolled his goodness *too much*, or represented him *better* than he is!—O that I could praise him more! For "who can shew forth all his praise!"†—But if there are any persons so degenerate, as to think their Father in heaven too much honoured; instead of telling them, there is another title better adapted to persons of

* 1 Tim. II. 6. † Psalm 106. 2.

of ſuch a depraved mind, than that of *Sons*, I muſt again refer them to my TEXT, to the apoſtle John, to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and to the holy ſcriptures in general. I have ſaid nothing, as to the extent and perfection of God's goodneſs, but what I firſt learnt from them; nothing more than God has revealed as truth. And if it is truth at all, it is certainly moſt intereſting, important truth; to be known, and joyfully received by all, to the glory of God; at once to ſhew men what ſentiments, diſpoſitions and affections, ought to poſſeſs their hearts with relation to Him, and to form their temper and behaviour towards others —Thus ſhall ye be, indeed, "the children of the HIGHEST; for he is kind un-"to the unthankful, and to the evil. Be ye there-"fore merciful, as your FATHER alſo is merciful."*

* Luke 6. Chap.

The end of the firſt Sermon.

SERMON.

SERMON II.

Some Objections againſt the Goodneſs of GOD conſidered; and the Subject applied to the Occaſion, with practical Inferences and Reflexions.

PSALM CXLV. 9.

THE LORD is good to ALL; *and his tender Mercies are over* ALL *his Works.*

THE firſt thing propoſed in handling this important ſubject, was,

Iſt. To make ſome obſervations on the goodneſs of GOD in general: And the

IId. To conſider the extent and perfection of it, according to the repreſentation in the text: Wherein the LORD is declared to be "GOOD to ALL," &c.

THESE

THESE things were done in the morning. I proceed therefore, by divine aſſiſtance, without repeating any thing ſaid under theſe two heads, to the third propoſed; *viz.*

IIIdly. To take a curſory notice of ſome of the principal objections againſt the divine goodneſs.

HOWEVER demonſtrable it may be from certain known and acknowledged principles, that the great and glorious God is perfectly good; or how frequently and clearly ſoever it may be declared in the holy ſcriptures, that he is thus good; yet it cannot be denied, that there are many things, both in the viſible world, and in the ſcriptures themſelves, which may, at firſt view at leaſt, have the appearance of conſiderable objections againſt it. This is not, indeed, a proper occaſion for entering very minutely into ſuch matters as theſe. There is not time for it, if One were ſo diſpoſed. But yet it might, perhaps, be thought a material omiſſion, if I paſſed over ALL the difficulties that occur with reference to what is aſſerted in the text, in *total* ſilence. And the preſent ſeaſon of the year * itſelf, ſuggeſts one objection; with which I ſhall therefore begin.

1. SOME have found fault with the conſtitution of the world, or that courſe of nature which ſubjects the inhabitants of this earth, both man and beaſt, to the extremes of heat and cold. A great part of the year, it is ſaid, we are half frozen; and another conſiderable part of the year, we are parched with exceſſive heat. Is not this a great infelicity? And how came ſuch a courſe of nature to be eſtabliſhed, if the Author of it is "good to all"? &c.

LET it be here briefly obſerved,

THAT

* December.

That if this is any real fault or defect, it might be attributed as properly to a want either of wiſdom or of power, as of goodneſs. Why ſhould it be imputed rather to a defect of the latter, than of either of the former, in the Author of nature? But,

The objection does, in effect, amount to no more than this: That we are not placed in ſo agreeable a ſituation, or in ſo delightful a world, as we may ourſelves imagine and deſire. Which, tho' true, is not a more ſolid objection againſt the goodneſs of God, than that we are not angels inſtead of men, and were not originally placed in heaven inſtead of earth; or that there is variety in God's works. That this variety is the conſequence of his being infinitely wiſe and good, and therefore no objection againſt either, was obſerved in the foregoing diſcourſe. And if that which falls to our lot, is not the moſt agreeable ſituation of any; yet, ſurely, we had not originally any right to a better. *

God mercifully provides us fewel and cloathing to defend us from the froſts of winter, and rains and breezes to refreſh us in the heats of ſummer; thereby mitigating the ſeverity, & the ſuppoſed inconvenience of theſe alternate extremes. Beſides; this viciſſitude in the ſeaſons, the gradual changes from one to the other, are in ſome reſpects very agreeable. This is a pleaſing variety. According to my own taſte at leaſt, it is much more grateful than any one conſtant, uniform, unvaried temperature of the air would be. This variety is probably much beſt upon the whole, even for thoſe that complain of it. Naturaliſts and learned Phyſicians have made it appear beyond doubt, that theſe viciſſitudes in the ſeaſons contribute very much, upon the whole, to the health, ſtrength

* See the 7th, 8th and 9th obſervations in the preceeding diſcourſe, p. 29, &c.

ſtrength and vigor of mankind, and other terreſtrial animals; and, at the ſame time, to the promoting of vegetation, and the increaſe of thoſe fruits, &c. which are needed for their ſubſiſtence. Moreover:

By means of that particular oblique poſition of the earth's axis, from whence, in her annual courſe, this variety in the ſeaſons proceeds, a large proportion of the earth is render'd habitable, comfortable and fruitful, which would otherwiſe be abſolutely uninhabitable, barren and deſolate. If the ſun, to ſpeak according to the appearance, did not depart from the equinox, and alternately pay a friendly viſit towards the two poles, a much greater part of the earth about and towards them, would be uninhabitable by exceſſive cold; and the courſe of vegetation would be intirely ſtopped. At the ſame time, that part of the earth under and about the equator, would be render'd equally uninhabitable and barren, by the ſun's conſtantly beating upon it: And, as ſome have computed, at leaſt five ſixths of the whole globe * would, by this means, have been intirely uſeleſs. There would not have been proviſion made for ſo many men, and other animals, by many millions, yea millions of millions, if God had placed the earth, and given it ſuch a direction, as ſome perſons in their preſumtuous folly would have had him done, to preſerve them from the imaginary inconvenience of the ſeaſons! Theſe reflexions on them are, I think, ſufficient, not only to reconcile us both to ſummer and winter, but to give us exalted ideas of the infinite wiſdom and goodneſs of God in theſe viciſſitudes of nature.

2. One

* Vid. Dr. Cheyne's *Phil. Prin. of Relig.* Ch. V. Sect. 25 and 26. Where there are many curious obſervations on the ſeaſons.

2. One might here naturally take occaſion to ſpeak of ſtorms, tempeſts, droughts, peſtilence, earthquakes, and ſome other phænomena in the natural world, which ſome perſons may conſider as objections againſt the goodneſs of God. But I muſt only obſerve in general, that ſome of the foregoing remarks on the ſeaſons, are equally applicable to theſe other appearances. If they render life leſs ſecure and comfortable; yet it muſt be remembered that God, tho' infinite in goodneſs, is not obliged to put all his creatures into ſituations equally deſireable; eſpecially ſinful creatures. Nay, infinite wiſdom and goodneſs require the contrary. But ſome of the things abovementioned, evidently contribute, in their places, to the perfection of the natural world. Others of them are adapted to anſwer the moſt important moral ends, conſidering the nature of man, who needs to have his attention frequently rouſed to religious and moral ſubjects. And if there are any of thoſe things, as I am far from thinking there are, which are not poſitively beneficial in either of theſe ways; yet they at leaſt proceed from ſuch general laws of nature, as are upon the whole moſt wiſe, good and excellent; and which could not, probably, be broken in upon, or ſuſpended in their operations, without great detriment, perhaps deſtruction to the world.

3. It may be objected, that there are many poiſonous, and other noxious vegetables & animals. But,

There are alſo many natural means of preſervation from, and remedies of, theſe ſuppoſed evils. And moſt things that have certain poiſonous qualities, being properly prepared by the art of the phyſician and chimiſt, are themſelves the beſt antidotes and remedies that are known in nature.

As to thoſe animals that are troubleſome & noxious to mankind, they may yet enjoy pleaſure in life *themſelves:* And who told us, that they ought to be wholly ſubſervient to the happineſs of *man!* Beſides; mankind, in the preſent ſtate, actually need trials and afflictions, as a means of promoting their moral good, and future happineſs. There is no doubt, but that this is one end which the infinitely wiſe and good Creator has, in the production and preſervation of ſuch animals. It ſeems probable, from ſome paſſages of ſcripture, that had mankind perſevered in their original innocence, as they would not have needed ſuch afflictions, ſo neither would they have had them; the nature of the inferior creatures before the fall, having been different in ſome reſpects from what it has been ſince. Nor is it an impoſſible ſuppoſition, whatever a falſe, minute and ſpurious philoſophy may ſuggeſt, that at the "time of the reſtitution [or renovation] of all things, ſpoken of by the mouth of all "the prophets ſince the world began," * theſe miſchievous and noxious creatures may ceaſe to be ſuch.— "The wolf alſo ſhall dwell with the lamb, and the "leopard ſhall lie down with the kid: And the calf, "and the young lion, and the fatling together, and "a little child ſhall lead them. And the cow and "the bear ſhall feed, their young ones ſhall lie down "together: And the lion ſhall eat ſtraw like the ox. "And the ſucking child ſhall play on the hole of the "aſp, and the weaned child ſhall put his hand on the "cockatrice den. They ſhall not hurt nor deſtroy "in all my holy mountain: For the earth ſhall be "full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters "cover the ſea." †

4. WHAT has juſt now been ſaid, naturally brings to mind another objection. How many millions of the inferior creatures on the earth, in the air and water,

* Acts III. 21. † Iſai. XI. 6——9.

water, ſeem to live and die in a miſerable manner, preying continually on one another; while all of them are, in ſome degree, the prey of man, who tho' ſo much leſs and weaker than many of them, yet out-wits, and ſo plays the tyrant over them all? How does it conſiſt with the goodneſs of God, to make ſuch creatures, and leave them in ſuch a ſtate!

It may be anſwered, that theſe animals, birds, fiſh, inſects, &c. appear in general to enjoy no ſmall degree of pleaſure in life, while they are preſerved in it, according to their reſpective natures & capacities. The bountiful Author of nature feeds them all, and ſupplies their wants. Leviathan, and all the watry tribes play, diſport themſelves, and rejoice for a time in the great deep, the lakes, ponds and rivers. The birds and fowles of heaven do the like in the air, the water, or on the earth, as ſuits them beſt. The beaſts do the ſame in the paſtures, woods and foreſts. The ſmaller animals, reptiles, and all inſects do the like. And men generally take a kind care of domeſtic animals, and of all thoſe which they either employ in their ſervice, or deſign for their food; liberally feeding and feaſting them.

Most of the untamed animals, &c. die a natural death without fear, and probably without much pain, when they have run thro' the courſes and ſtages aſſigned to them reſpectively. And as to thoſe of them that become the prey of man, or of one another; this is ſeldom, if ever, till they have enjoyed much more pleaſure in life, than they endure pain in being deprived of it: Eſpecially when it is conſidered, that their death is commonly almoſt inſtantaneous; and without any ſuch uneaſy reflexions on what is paſt, or apprehenſions reſpecting futurity, as mankind experience. So that all theſe living creatures,

tures, whether wild or tame, in all probability enjoy a ſurpluſage of pleaſurable ſenſations, according to their natures and capacities: And if ſo, the Author of their being is good and merciful to them. It ſhould likewiſe be conſidered, that thoſe living creatures, which afford food and ſuſtenance to man, or to other creatures, at the expence of their own lives, thereby do good to their *devourers*; and ſo, in a ſenſe, add to the common happineſs even by their tragical end.

But if there are any of them, which do not enjoy a ſhare of pleaſure ſuperior to their pains in life and death; (an unſupported hypotheſis) yet how came you to know, that there is certainly an end of all, or any of them at death? Who told you that they do not tranſmigrate into, or aſſume other bodies ſucceſſively, in which they enjoy life in a more perfect manner than in the preceeding ſtate? Has God plainly revealed any thing to the contrary, in his word? No. Does reaſon diſcern any impoſſibility, abſurdity, or even improbability in this ſuppoſition? Neither of them. Nay; there is ſome natural and poſitive ground of preſumption, or a degree of probability, that this is really the truth. It is certain that every *living*, *ſenſitive* creature, is endowed with ſome principle diſtinct from matter; call it ſoul, ſpirit or what you pleaſe, it is of no conſequence. All matter, all that is properly and ſolely ſuch, is evidently void of animal life and ſenſation, of all feeling and perception, in every degree. The living, ſenſitive, feeling and perceptive principle, therefore, in all animals, inſects, &c. is immaterial, or ſomething abſolutely and intirely diſtinct in nature from matter. And this *may* ſurvive the body, be continued after the diſſolution of the preſent organs of ſenſation, and live in another body, if the Author of its being pleaſes it ſhould:

Tho'

Tho' I do not preſume to aſſert poſitively, that it will. But there is nothing abſurd, unſcriptural or irrational in the ſuppoſition: Nay; the transformations, or tranſmigrations that are actually obſerved in ſome living creatures, render it credible in itſelf, and, in a degree, probable. But if the ſuppoſition is barely a *poſſible* one, it is a ſufficient anſwer to the objection drawn from the ſufferings of brutes and inſects, againſt the expreſs doctrine of ſcripture, That the "Lord is good to all," &c. Though, by the way, if this laſt, hypothetical ſolution ſhould be given up as indefenſible; yet, as was intimated before, it can never be proved that any one of theſe living creatures endures either more, or as much pain, as it enjoyed pleaſure, in life and death.

5. It will not be unnatural to proceed from hence to that capital objection, which is grounded on the many ſufferings and pains of mankind in the preſent ſtate, too well known to need deſcribing.

To which I anſwer, That mankind alſo enjoy many pleaſures; and, as is generally ſuppoſed, many more than are equivalent to the pains which they endure in this ſtate. If we are ſubject to diſeaſes, the Author of nature has alſo in mercy provided remedies. He feeds and cloaths us, and ſupplies our natural wants; as to moſt of us, in a very liberal manner. Moſt of the pains, both mental and corporeal, which mankind ſuffer in this world, are of their own creating; they are the natural effects of intemperance, and other vices. And it would be very injurious to object theſe againſt that goodneſs of God, which we thus abuſe to our own hurt. *

At leaſt ſome of the ſufferings of this life, are judicial and corrective; brought upon us by the providence

* See page 29, Remark 6th of Serm. I.

vidence of God for our ſins, to chaſtize, and thereby to reform us, in order to our preſent and future good. And all ſuch *evils*, as we may call them when conſidered merely in themſelves, are actually effects of the divine goodneſs, inſtead of being ſolid objections againſt it. *

But there are ſome children, who are born, live, and ſoon die, in pain; before they have actually done any evil, or committed any fault. Be it ſo. But do you certainly know, that what they enjoyed in the womb before their birth, was not more than equivalent to what they ſuffered at the time of, or after it, in life and death? You have no *proof* of this, however *poſitive* you may be. But, allowing you to be certain, as well as confident, that theſe infants endure more than they enjoy, antecedently to their dying; yet are not their ſouls immortal? And are they not ſtill in the hands of Him, who has ſaid, "Behold, all "ſouls are mine, as the ſoul of the father, ſo alſo the "ſoul of the ſon is mine—The ſon ſhall not bear the "iniquity of the father?"† Is it not then, at leaſt ſuppoſable that ſuch infants, never having ſinned in any ſtrict or proper ſenſe, go to an happier ſtate than that, out of which they were taken? And if ſo, their momentary pains here, are no ſolid objection againſt the goodneſs of God. Indeed, if there are any perſons who aſſert, that beſides theſe pains, they ſuffer the "wrath and curſe" of God, and "the pains of hell for ever;" it is doubtleſs impoſſible to reconcile this, not only with infinite goodneſs and mercy, but even with a very ſmall degree thereof. To ſuppoſe that they either properly committed any ſin, long before they were conceived in the womb; or that the ſin of Adam and Eve, is or can be ſo imputed to them,

* See p. 25. Remark 8th of Serm. I.

† Ezek. 18. 4, 20.

them, as to render them *juſtly* liable to eternal miſery, without any offence of their own, is one of the groſeſt of all abſurdities. They who are capable of believing ſuch unſcriptural and irrational doctrine, and of thinking juſtice ſo much at variance with goodneſs, wiſdom and mercy, as this ſuppoſes, are to be pitied as perſons of a ſadly depraved judgment. But if it were allowed that theſe "infants of a ſpan long," were juſtly liable to eternal torments, as ſome have aſſerted; yet upon their own principles, and even according to their own falſe idea of divine juſtice, God *may* ſhew mercy to them. They do not pretend to ſay, that God is obliged to go as far in puniſhing as he might go, according to their conceptions of juſtice. So that theſe infants, upon any principles which ſuppoſe the immortality of the ſoul, *may* be eternal monuments of that goodneſs and mercy, againſt which their untimely death is thought an objection. And the bare poſſibility of this, is a ſufficient anſwer to that objection, unleſs it could be proved that ſome of them are *certainly* devoted to future torment;—an opinion equally irrational, unſcriptural & antichriſtian.

6. It may perhaps be objected, that the ſcripture doctrine of Chriſt's atonement, or ſacrifice, is inconſiſtent with what has been ſaid concerning the perfection of God's goodneſs; and particularly with that idea of it which was given in the preceeding diſcourſe, as comprehending juſtice in it; which latter is not there ſuppoſed to be any attribute of God, diſtinct from, but one branch or mode of, his eſſential goodneſs. If God be thus perfectly good and merciful in his nature, why did he not forgive the ſins of men without any ſacrifice? without any reconciliation for ſin? eſpecially if divine juſtice is nothing diſtinct in nature from divine goodneſs. What occaſion was there for any atonement, upon theſe principles?—

Whereas

Whereas the ſcriptures conſtantly ſuppoſe the need of it in order to the pardon of ſin.

UPON the principles of the foregoing diſcourſe, infinite goodneſs itſelf, conſidered in connection with infinite wiſdom, requires that order, and the higheſt veneration for the majeſty of God, his laws and government, ſhould be preſerved amongſt all his reaſonable creatures. Their own good eſſentially depends upon it. And this important end is moſt effectually attained by the ſacrifice of Chriſt, "by whom we have received the atonement." We are aſſured in the holy ſcriptures, that God forgives the ſins of men thro' this great ſacrifice intervening, rather than without any, not becauſe he is in his own nature deficient in goodneſs, or not perfectly merciful, but becauſe he is infinitely *wiſe* as well as merciful; taking ſuch a method herein, as is in its nature admirably adapted to "magnify the law, and make it honourable;" i. e. to beget and preſerve in the minds of reaſonable creatures, a juſt ſenſe of God's authority, the dignity of his laws and government: Which, as was intimated before, is evidently beſt even for themſelves. In this ſenſe the apoſtle, having obſerved that Chriſt by the grace of God taſted death for every man, adds, "For it BECAME Him, "for whom are all things, & by whom are all things, "in bringing many ſons unto glory, to make the "Captain of their ſalvation perfect thro' ſufferings."* It became his wiſdom, it became his goodneſs, it became his mercy, even that very "grace of God, by which Chriſt taſted death for every man." There was a fitneſs and congruity in it, as the wiſeſt and beſt method for ſaving ſinful men, without any kind of reference to that common, but yet *ſtrange* ſuppoſition, of divine juſtice being intirely diſtinct from divine goodneſs. Beſides:

THE

* Heb. II. 9, 10.

THE ſcriptures uniformly ſpeak of Chriſt's mediation, and his dying for ſinners, as the effect or conſequence of God's original goodneſs and mercy. "God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,"* &c. "In this was manifeſted the love "of God towards us—He loved us, *and ſent his Son* "*to be the propitiation for our ſins.*"† Theſe repreſentations of Chriſt's dying, "the juſt for the unjuſt," as *conſequential* to, and the *effect* of, God's love, mercy and grace, are ſo far from ſuppoſing any ſuch juſtice in God as is often ſpoken of, diſtinct in nature from goodneſs, and to ſatisfy which, it is ſaid, Chriſt died; that they appear to me abſolutely irreconcileable therewith. Neither does it ſeem even poſſible to aſſert, and ſolidly to maintain, this moſt important doctrine of our redemption by the blood of Chriſt, but upon the ſuppoſition of its being the wiſeſt and beſt, i. e. the moſt benevolent and gracious method of diſpenſing pardon and life to ſinners; in ſuch a ſenſe as wholly and forever to exclude any ſuch idea of divine juſtice, as is often given us.—Tho', by the way, theſe things are not ſaid by me, but with an high veneration for thoſe many wiſe and excellent men, who either have, or ſeem to have, different conceptions of this matter. But,

7. How ſhall we reconcile the ſuppoſition of God's leaving the whole heathen world to unavoidable and eternal miſery, with infinite goodneſs and mercy?

To this it will be ſufficient to anſwer in general, firſt, That it is by no means a clear and certain point, either from reaſon or revelation, that all the heathen will actually be miſerable in the world to come: And, ſecondly, That if they ſhall be ſo, they will be puniſhed only for their ſins; and in due meaſure only. And

* John 3. 16. † 1 John IV. 9, 10.

to puniſh them thus, is not, certainly, inconſiſtent with the moſt perfect goodneſs.

8. WHAT ſhall we ſay to the doctrine of God's having reprobated a great proportion of mankind; or, from eternity devoted them in his abſolute decree and purpoſe, to eternal torments, without any reſpect or regard to any ſins of theirs, as the procuring and meritorious cauſe of their perdition? and this, at the ſame time, to make manifeſt and glorify his JUSTICE! What can be ſaid to this? and how ſhall it be reconciled with the ſuppoſition, that God's *tender mercies* are over *all* his works?

I WILL tell you, in a very few words, what I have to ſay to it at preſent. And that is, firſt, That if any perſons really hold ſuch a doctrine, neither any man on earth, nor angel in heaven, can reconcile it with the goodneſs of God. And, ſecondly, That I have not my ſelf the leaſt inclination to attempt a reconciliation of theſe doctrines; being perſwaded, that they are juſt as contrary as light and darkneſs, Chriſt & Belial;—that one of them is moſt true and ſcriptural, joyful to man, and honourable to God; and the other moſt falſe and unſcriptural, horrible to the laſt degree, to all men of an undepraved judgment, and blaſphemous againſt the God of heaven and earth. Neither is it poſſible for any man, who really believes what the ſcriptures teach concerning the goodneſs of God, even to think of this other doctrine, but with great indignation. But,

9. How can what the holy ſcriptures unqueſtionably teach, reſpecting the greatneſs of the puniſhment of thoſe who die impenitently under the goſpel, be reconciled with God's goodneſs & mercy as declared in the ſame ſcriptures? To this it is anſwered,

1. THAT

1. That God certainly exerciſes great goodneſs and mercy towards ſuch ſinners in this world; not only in ſupplying their temporal wants, but in affording them ſuch means of knowledge and eternal happineſs, as nothing but their own wilful blindneſs and perverſeneſs can render ineffectual to that end. All are invited and perſwaded, in the moſt gracious and pathetic terms, to accept of eternal life, thro' Him that "gave himſelf a ranſom for all."

2 It is not inconſiſtent with the moſt perfect goodneſs, eſpecially in certain caſes, to puniſh wicked men. No earthly ſovereign is accounted the leſs good or merciful for puniſhing rebels, traitors and felons even *capitally*, when the ſupport of his government, and the common good of his kingdom require it. Nay, ſhould he neglect to do it in this caſe, he would be the leſs good and merciful; becauſe it would be a ſort of cruelty to his other ſubjects: At beſt it would be a great weakneſs in him. Why then ſhould God, the great and only Potentate, be thought the leſs good or merciful for inflicting ſuch puniſhment on wicked men, as the ſupport of his government, and the great end thereof, call for? Goodneſs, perfect goodneſs, nay, tender mercy itſelf requires this: God would not be perfectly good and merciful, if he did not inflict *ſuch* puniſhment, how terrible ſoever in its nature and duration, as is requiſite to this end.

3. The light of nature aſcertains neither the kind, the degree, nor the duration of that puniſhment, which is neceſſary to be inflicted on the wicked in another world, in order to the due ſupport of God's government; or, in other words, in order to the attaining the good, great and glorious end thereof. Men may, if they pleaſe, preſume and be confident, that *this* or *that*, and no more, is neceſſary in

order to the end propoſed; and therefore conclude, not unjuſtly, if the premiſes were true, that no more, greater or more durable pains and penalties, will be inflicted. But after all this confidence, mere human reaſon is as inadequate a judge of the matter, as a child of ten years old is, what courſe his King ought to take with thoſe that have broken the laws. The light of nature leaves mankind altogether as much in the dark in one caſe, as this child's reaſon leaves him in the other. Which, by the way, ſhews the neceſſity of an expreſs revelation from heaven, if it were only to give ſinners the *aſſurance* of a *pardon*.

4. The obvious concluſion from theſe principles, is, that it becomes us to ſit down contented with what God has actually revealed, reſpecting this ſubject. He, and only He, knows particularly, how great or durable puniſhments are neceſſary to anſwer the good ends of his univerſal government; or how it becomes infinite wiſdom and goodneſs to diſpoſe of ſinful creatures. Human reaſon knows not what is wiſeſt and beſt in this caſe. So that, I ſee not what any ſober man has to do in it, but to inform himſelf what the real doctrine of ſcripture upon the ſubject is; and to acquieſce in whatever God has declared to be his purpoſe. Whatever that be, we may reſt aſſured that it is at once moſt for the glory of God, and for the good of his univerſal kingdom; ſuch puniſhment as it becomes the God and Father of all to inflict. For "ſhall not the Judge of all the earth do right!"

Having ſaid thus much concerning the future puniſhment of wicked men, the duration of which, you know, is divers times expreſſed by the words, *eternal*, *everlaſting*, *for ever and ever*, and the like; it is needleſs to ſubjoin any thing particularly about that of the rebel-angels: For the ſame principles and general way of reaſoning, are equally applicable to both.

There

THERE is no juſt and ſufficient cauſe to doubt, either from any appearances in nature, or from any *real* doctrine of revelation, but that God is good and merciful in the higheſt conceivable ſenſe. But there are poſitive, concluſive and demonſtrative proofs of his being ſo. Let me add here, that if this doctrine of the perfect goodneſs of God, is not ſtrictly true in the higheſt imaginable ſenſe, (tho' I almoſt tremble even at making ſuch a ſuppoſition, which I abhor as impious,) there is not ſufficient ground for an unreſerved truſt and confidence in him. For if he may be ſuppoſed to act unreaſonably, cruelly, or contrary to the dictates of goodneſs in any one caſe, why not in others ? why not in many ? why not in any ſuppoſed caſe ? Where then is your ſafety ? What ſecurity has any man on earth, or angel in heaven, that he ſhall not, even without reaſon, without juſt cauſe, become the object of God's inſupportable wrath ! Will you ſay, that you are effectually ſecured by his own gracious promiſe ? But what firm, unreſerved confidence can be placed in his word and promiſe, unleſs he is ſuppoſed to be perfectly good and faithful ? If he is not ſo, he may deceive you ; and, inſtead of exalting you to heaven hereafter, " thruſt you down to hell !" If he deals arbitrarily, capriciouſly and cruelly by others, may he not do the ſame by you, notwithſtanding his ſuppoſed word and promiſe ? No doubt : For any being that acts ſuch a part in one caſe, may do the like in another. Where then is your " Rock" of peace ? On what is your hope, your confidence grounded, upon the preſent ſuppoſition ?—Alas ! on nothing better than the word and promiſe of a being, who is capable of acting unreaſonably, arbitrarily and cruelly ; or contrary to the dictates of goodneſs !—A miſerable ſupport to an immortal ſoul, that muſt be either happy or miſerable while it exiſts, and is abſolutely dependent upon

Him that made it !—It is, therefore, at leaſt for the *intereſt* of all, that God ſhould be as perfectly good and merciful, as he has been repreſented : Which, tho' it is no direct *proof*, is yet ſufficient to ſhew, that no man can in reaſon be prejudiced againſt this doctrine, or have any diſlike to it, even upon ſuppoſition that he does not at preſent ſee ſufficient evidence of it. Tho', how any One can poſſibly doubt of it, and yet believe the holy ſcriptures, is quite unaccountable. For is it not therein declared—" The Lord is " good to ALL, and his tender mercies are over ALL " his works ?" But I proceed,

IV. To make ſome application of this ſubject, by reminding you more particularly of the great goodneſs of God to Us, both in temporal and ſpiritual reſpects ; and by ſuch inferences and reflexions, as may at once tend to the honor of God, and ſhew what influence the conſideration of his goodneſs, ought to have upon your hearts and manners.

Now, if we conſider ourſelves as MEN, we are a diſtinguiſhed order of creatures, and under great obligations to our Creator. However inferior we may be to many creatures in other parts of the univerſe ; (inferior indeed !) yet there is no preſumption, no vanity in ſaying, that we are much ſuperior to any of the other inhabitants of this world. For which pre-eminence of nature and rank, we are indebted only to Him that *made us thus* ; " of whom, and thro' whom, and to whom are all things."

IF we conſider ourſelves, in the next place, as creatures *redeemed* from ſin and death by the Son of God in human fleſh, we are ſtill more wonderfully favoured and diſtinguiſhed. God is in Chriſt reconciling, not a comparatively ſmall part of mankind to himſelf,

ſelf, according to the repreſentations of ſome, but the "WORLD" itſelf. For Chriſt "is the propitiation—for the ſins of the WHOLE WORLD." And it "pleaſed the Father—by him to reconcile ALL things unto himſelf, by him, I ſay, whether things in earth, or things in heaven."—"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath beſtowed upon us," in this reſpect!

IF we conſider ourſelves as having been born and brought up in the *chriſtian world*, had the advantages of a religious education, and "even from children known the holy ſcriptures, which are able to make us wiſe unto ſalvation;" we muſt acknowledge the particular kindneſs & goodneſs of God to us in theſe regards. Had we been born in a land of Pagan or Mahometan darkneſs, or had we been born and educated Jews; we might probably have been Pagans, Mahometans or Jews to this day: Whereas we are now Chriſtians, by profeſſion at leaſt; and if we are not practically ſuch, the fault is our own.

WE are ſtill farther diſtinguiſhed and favoured of God, by having been born and bred in a *proteſtant* country, and a *reformed* part of the chriſtian church; inſtead of a roman-catholic country, & in the errors, ſuperſtitions and idolatries of the church of Rome. For had the latter been our lot, we ſhould probably, the moſt of us, have been enſlaved to thoſe deluſions, and the papal tyranny to this day. And thoſe of us, whom God ſhould have given light and courage enough to caſt them off, might have ſuffered a cruel perſecution, and "for conſcience towards God endured grief;" as proteſtants now do, even in France itſelf, from a pretended moſt polite, humane and refined, but really *barbarous* people in ſome reſpects. And yet they are by far the leaſt bigotted to the papacy, of any roman-catholic nation!

IF

If we conſider ourſelves as *Britiſh* ſubjects, and entitled to the liberties and privileges of ſuch, both civil and ſacred; we muſt acknowledge that providence has, in this reſpect, favoured us above moſt *other* proteſtants: Very few of whom, I might perhaps ſay none, live under ſo happy and excellent a form of government as ourſelves.

We are alſo favoured of God, the univerſal Sovereign, in having a *good King*, as well as an excellent conſtitution of government. Bad Kings may prove a ſore ſcourge even in a free government, tho' there is an old paradox, that they "can do no wrong;" of which our own nation had repeated and dreadful experience, before the ever-memorable and glorious REVOLUTION. Since that, we have had good Princes: And his preſent Majeſty is doubtleſs one of the beſt-intention'd Monarchs in the world. We may ſay, upon good grounds, that "becauſe the Lord loved us, therefore made he him King over us, to do juſtice and judgment." This he has hitherto done; and will doubtleſs continue to do it, if the *Achitophels* and *Machiavels* are kept from, and poſſibly even tho' they ſhould ſurround, the throne.

We muſt farther acknowledge the goodneſs of God in lately giving the King a *Son* and *Heir*; and thereby confirming to all his loyal ſubjects, the agreeable hopes of the proteſtant ſucceſſion being perpetuated in his illuſtrious houſe.—Heaven preſerve the King, the Queen and the royal Infant: The two former, to be illuſtrious examples of conjugal affection and happineſs;—of all piety and virtue, not only to their own ſubjects, but to other Kings and Queens: And the latter, to inherit his Father's virtues with his throne, whenever it ſhall pleaſe Him who "ruleth in the kingdom of men," to exalt the One above, and raiſe the Other to it!

We

We are, moreover, to acknowledge the goodneſs of God in continuing to ſucceed the King's arms, in the courſe of the year paſt, after having crowned them with ſo many illuſtrious ſucceſſes and victories for ſeveral years before. Two very ſignal acquiſitions have been made by the Britiſh arms, ſince our laſt annual thankſgiving;—thoſe of MARTINICO and the HAVANNAH. And ſince theſe, the principal place in NEWFOUNDLAND, which the enemy had in ſuch a *myſterious* manner poſſeſſed themſelves of, has been reſcued out of their hands. This important recovery was effected with admirable diſpatch and facility, highly to the honor of thoſe who had the immediate planning, conduct and execution of the enterprize. And, upon the whole, we have the greateſt reaſon to expect an honorable, advantageous and laſting peace For I will not—cannot ſuppoſe, that either folly or puſillanimity, private avarice or treachery, in the cabinet, will relinquiſh thoſe ſignal advantages which wiſdom and valor, which public ſpirit and loyalty obtained in the field, and on the mighty ocean, thro' HIM that has "rode upon the heavens for our help, and in his excellency upon the ſkies;" tho' ſimilar things have been done in former reigns!*

If we come to our own country in particular; we have here enjoyed, of late, almoſt all the bleſſings of peace, in a time of war & tumult among the nations of Europe. We have alſo been favoured with gene-

K ral

* N. B. Since the delivery of this diſcourſe, we have had the important advices of the King of Pruſſia's, Prince Henry's and Prince Ferdinand's ſucceſſes; of the Spaniards retreat out of Portugal, and the ſigning the PRELIMINARIES for a PEACE betwixt Great Britian and Portugal on one ſide, and France and Spain on the other. But it was tho't proper to leave the paragraph above, as it was delivered—May the God of peace and love perfect the good work of peace thus begun!

ral health. Our invaluable civil rights and privileges are preserved to us. I do not say, that they have even been struck at, in any instance or degree—But if they have, they are not wrested from us: And may righteous heaven blast the designs, tho' not the soul or the body of that man, whoever he be amongst us, that shall have the hardiness and presumption to attack them!

Let me add, that tho' we were visited with a pretty severe drought in the summer past, yet the rains which succeeded, came so seasonably, and in such competent measure, that there is a supply of the necessaries, and very many of the comforts of life: So that, to say the least, there is no danger of famine or distress amongst us for want of them. And we have also been, and still are, greatly favoured in the temperate and moderate weather, continued this year so much beyond the usual time: Which is, in divers respects, a great mitigation of the calamity in the drought before-mentioned.

Thus, my brethren, I have briefly reminded you of some of the many instances of God's goodness to mankind in general, and to ourselves in particular: All which it becomes us gratefully to acknowledge to the glory of Him, who is "good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works." It now remains, to draw some practical inferences & instructions from this subject. It affords many important ones: And, indeed, I shall mention a considerable number, tho' but briefly, for fear of being tedious. And,

1. The consideration of God's goodness, shews the reason and proper ground of love to God, and complacency in him. To love, or delight in an evil, cruel, arbitrary and unrighteous being, as such, is impossible

poſſible to any, except unreaſonable and depraved minds. But ſuch a being as God is repreſented in ſcripture; One ſo good and merciful to All, muſt needs be loved by every perſon that is not himſelf unreaſonable, corrupt and depraved to a monſtrous degree. For what is it but, I had almoſt ſaid, *infinite* folly, perverſeneſs and wickedneſs, not to love infinite goodneſs!

2. WHAT has been ſaid concerning the divine goodneſs, as comprehending juſtice, and the other moral perfections of God in it; ſhews that he ought to be loved on account of theſe alſo. That is, he is to be loved, conſidered under the character, not merely of a benevolent Being, in the common reſtrained ſenſe of the word benevolence; but under the character of a moſt holy, juſt and righteous, as well as kind and beneficent Being. God's moral character is to be taken all together; the ſeveral branches of it are to be conſidered as united by and in the bond of love, and inſeparably connected with infinite wiſdom. And then, God is to be loved as a Being of ſuch a character; a character, in its own nature infinitely amiable. Nor is there any true, proper and genuine love to God, but what reſpects him in the whole of this character. Even wicked men may and do, often at leaſt, love him as a kind, bountiful and merciful Being, in a reſtrained, partial ſenſe of thoſe words, while they hate him conſidered as a juſt, righteous and holy One. But this is not to love God in the ſenſe of ſcripture. Good men, and only ſuch, love him as the ſource and centre of all moral perfection in general.

3. HENCE it is eaſy to ſee, not only the reaſon why, to love God is ſpoken of as the firſt and greateſt of all the commandments; but alſo the ground of that

intire and ardent, I had almoſt ſaid, that infinite and boundleſs love to him, which is required of us. For if God is indeed ſuch a Being as the ſcriptures repreſent him, it is at once manifeſt that we ought to love him firſt and laſt; and not only ſincerely, but "with all our heart & with all our ſoul, with all our ſtrength and with all our mind." Even of ſuch a love from all, that Being is manifeſtly the proper object, who is himſelf "good to all, and whoſe tender mercies are over all his works." And the more largely God has cauſed us to partake of his goodneſs, whether in temporal or ſpiritual regards, the ſtronger is our obligation to love him thus; and the more inexcuſable we are, if we do not.

4. From hence we may clearly ſee the reaſon, why, to "love our neighbour as ourſelves," is ſpoken of by our Saviour as the next, the *ſecond* commandment, and *like* unto the firſt; why love is repreſented as the "fulfilling of the law," &c. For if God is thus good, it is evident that, next to loving himſelf, he muſt require his intelligent creatures to love one another; and this as the ſum of all the duties which they mutually owe to each other. No particular duty of the moral law, I mean, of the ſecond table, can naturally and reaſonably claim ſuch a pre-eminence, ſuch a glorious precedence in the order of offices, as charity, which does in a ſort comprehend them all; even as God's goodneſs comprehends his other moral perfections. And love muſt needs be the ſupreme, univerſal, unchangeable law of ſuch a Being, to all his reaſonable creatures; to angels in heaven, as well as men on earth; and to creatures inferior to men, if any ſuch there are, capable ſubjects of moral government; as it is highly probable there are.

5. From

5. From hence appears the unreaſonableneſs, and great ſin of indulging anger, revenge, diſproportionate reſentment, and an implacable ſpirit; together with the wiſdom and importance of thoſe numerous precepts in the goſpel, relative to meekneſs, forbearance, forgiving injuries, and the like. The indulgence of any of thoſe paſſions, any farther than may reaſonably be ſuppoſed conducive to ſome poſitively good end, is not merely contrary to the ſpirit and precepts of the goſpel, but it renders men peculiarly unlike to the infinitely good & merciful God. Nor is there any thing greater, more glorious and god-like, than to love them that hate us, and to do good to them that deſpitefully uſe us. Neither is it without a very peculiar emphaſis, that He who died for us as ſinners and enemies, enjoins us to do thus, "that we may be the children of our Father in heaven, who is himſelf good to the unthankful and to the evil."

6. It may from hence be inferred, that all God's particular commandments, as diſtinguiſhed from thoſe two grand, moſt fundamental & comprehenſive ones before-mentioned, are not only holy and juſt, but good; actually kind and beneficial in their nature, deſign and tendency; adapted to promote the great end of his univerſal government, the good of his creatures, and therein his own glory: For theſe are inſeparably connected. Or, if any chuſe rather to expreſs it thus,—That God's view is, to promote his *own glory* by *doing good*, making the latter the *means*, and the former the *end*; I have no objection, except that it may, perhaps, ſeem to repreſent him rather as an ambitious Being, who deſires the praiſe & homage of his creatures, than an infinitely good One, who aims at making them happy without any *ſelfiſh* end, incompatible with a perfect character, and with abſolute

ſolute ſelf-ſufficience.—But I *aſſert* nothing upon this point. However that may be, yet it is certain that none of the commands of a perfectly good and merciful Being, can be mere arbitrary injunctions and impoſitions, without any good end: Much leſs can they have a contrary tendency. Of this we may be certain in general, even tho' we ſhould not be able particularly to diſcern the benevolent deſign and tendency of ſome of God's revealed commands; as, for example, ſome branches of the ceremonial law. There is no good reaſon to doubt, but that they were all wiſely and kindly intended. And as to all the precepts of chriſtianity without exception, One need not ſcruple to ſay poſitively, that the good end and tendency of them is eaſily and clearly diſcernable.

7. We learn from hence, how liberal, ingenuous and chearful, as well as how univerſal an obedience they who believe in God, ought to yield to his commandments. Does it become us, my brethren, to obey Him with reluctance, and grutchingly, who is good to all, and all whoſe commandments are in their very nature kind and good, as if we were obeying a tyrant, or cruel taſk-maſter, who cared not what became of us, ſo that his own ſelfiſh ends were but anſwered? If God governs us according to the rules of wiſdom and benevolence, even as a father doth his children, only in an infinitely more gracious and perfect manner, ſhould our obedience be gloomy, reluctant, ſervile and ſlaviſh, as if we only feared a *Baſtile* and the *torture!* How incongruous were this! Such an obedience may be ſuitable enough for ſome nations to pay to the edicts of their tyrannical and cruel Monarchs; but, ſurely, it is altogether unbecoming chriſtians to their God, their Father in heaven! Your obedience to Him ought to be, in the higheſt ſenſe, liberal, chearful, filial, joyful. It becomes you, in other

other words, to be "followers of God as *dear chil-* "*dren*; and to walk in *love*, as Chriſt alſo hath loved "us, and given himſelf for us, an offering, and a "ſacrifice to God, for a ſweet-ſmelling ſavour."* This is the ſpirit of genuine chriſtianity; the deſign, tendency and fruit of the goſpel. Whoever is *wholly* a ſtranger to this, does not yet "know the grace of God in truth," how often ſoever he may have read or heard the goſpel. For ſays our Lord, "If ye con- "tinue in my word, then are ye my diſciples indeed: "And ye ſhall know the truth, and the *truth ſhall* "*make you free*—Ye ſhall be *free indeed*."†

8. All parents ſhould copy after the goodneſs of God, our heavenly Father, in providing for, and governing their children. They are unnatural parents indeed, who do not love their own offspring: God is good and merciful to all his. But, as has been obſerved, God's goodneſs is not a blind fondneſs, or mere inſtinctive benevolence: It is inſeparably connected with reaſon, and under the direction of wiſdom in all its operations. Under a ſimilar direction ſhould the love and affections of all parents be. They ought to look forward to conſequences, to conſult the real good of their children, and purſue that as their object; on one hand, by gratifying, as far as may be, all their reaſonable deſires, and on the other, by oppoſing ſuch as are unreaſonable, vicious and hurtful; not indulging them in any wrong way; not ſparing reproof, or even correction, when that is really neceſſary to anſwer the benevolent end propoſed. There are probably many more children hurt, and almoſt ruined, by the indiſcrete kindneſs, and exceſſive indulgence, than by the too great rigor and ſeverity of parents; tho' examples of the latter may not be wanting—"Whom the Lord loveth "he

* Eph. V. 1, 2. † John viii. 31, 32, 36.

" he chaſteneth, and ſcourgeth every ſon whom he " receiveth " And the following counſel, is that of a very tender father, as well as the wiſeſt of men and Kings, I mean Solomon : "Chaſten thy ſon while there is hope ; and let not thy ſoul ſpare for his crying."

9. From what has been ſaid concerning the univerſal goodneſs of God, not only to mankind, but even to the inferior orders of creatures, it appears to be unreaſonable and ſinful, and contrary to true goodneſs, to exerciſe cruelty towards the animal creation. Thoſe creatures which are adapted to human uſe, whether for labor, food, cloathing, or in any other way, we have indeed a right to uſe thus ; not from the mere light of nature, which gives no ſuch right, but by the expreſs grant of God ; whoſe are all the fowles of heaven, the fiſh of the ſea, " every beaſt of the foreſt, and the cattle upon a thouſand hills." (This was one, tho' it is far from being the only end of their creation). And, from thoſe animals that are noxious and miſchievous to us, we may doubtleſs defend ourſelves even by deſtroying them, tho' they ſhould be of no uſe to us afterwards. But to kill or torture any of the brute-creation, merely for the ſake of deſtroying or vexing them ; or even to uſe them with unneceſſary rigor and ſeverity in our ſervice, cannot be juſtified upon the principles of reaſon and benevolence Solomon ſays, " a *righteous* man regardeth the life of his beaſt." There have doubtleſs been many and great *immoralities* committed by men, in abuſing the creatures of God, even very inferior ones. There is alſo a degree of *impiety* therein. And cruelty to theſe animals, cannot but be offenſive to Him that made them, their Lord and Proprietor as well as ours ; and whoſe " tender mercies are over ALL his works."

10. God

10. GOD being good and merciful to all men, none, not even the pooreſt, meaneſt and loweſt of the human race, have any ground to complain of, or to murmur againſt Him and his providence: But, on the contrary, all have reaſon to be thankful for their being and preſervation; eſpecially when it is conſidered, that they will be immortally happy in another world, unleſs their own wickedneſs and perverſeneſs ſhould deſtroy them.

11. THE greateſt and happieſt men in this world, tho' they are under ſome peculiar obligations to gratitude, have yet no right, no cauſe, to deſpiſe the poor and low, or to glory in themſelves. Either of theſe things, would be at once fooliſh and impious. He that conſtituted the members in the natural body, and aſſigned them their reſpective offices as pleaſed him; He that appointed the foot to tread in the duſt, and to bear the load of the body; He that made the leaſt comely parts and members, to anſwer valuable ends, and to participate in the happineſs of the body; while He made the ear to hear, the eye to ſee, and the head to direct and govern the whole, has put an honor upon them all in their reſpective places: And neither of them can ſay to another, "I have no need of you." Thus it is alſo in the church, and in the greater ſociety of mankind. For in both reſpects, we are "members one of another;" and each, *ſuch a member* as the infinitely wiſe and good Author of the whole, pleaſed to make him. What ground is there then, for glorying or deſpiſing? For "what haſt thou, O man, that thou didſt not receive!"——

12. IT is at once the baſeſt ingratitude, and the greateſt folly, not to love and obey the bleſſed God; ſo good, merciful and tender a Father. O ungrate-

ful and degenerate children of the moſt High! For you are ſtill his offspring, tho' you have forgotten your Father, and "lightly eſteemed the rock of your ſalvation." In this reſpect wicked men are not leſs imprudent, than diſingenuous. To diſobey the holy, juſt and good commandments of God, which are in their very nature adapted to promote your happineſs, is to bring miſchief on yourſelves. Such a conduct, if continued in, cannot but end in your ruin, even without the conſideration of that future puniſhment, which God has expreſly threatned as the reward of unrighteouſneſs. There is no ſubſtantial happineſs, but in God, in knowing and doing his will. They that are far from him, the fountain of light, life and joy,—that refuſe to return to him, and to walk in his righteous ways, muſt needs periſh.

13. WHAT great encouragement does the conſideration of God's goodneſs afford to ſinners, to confeſs and forſake their ſins? to "ariſe and go to their Father"? Eſpecially, what encouragement does this afford, when the goodneſs of God is conſidered as it is manifeſted in the goſpel of Chriſt; who appeared to "take away the ſins of the world," and whoſe profeſſed deſign in coming into it, was to "ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt?" Can you poſſibly doubt of a kind reception, or a gracious pardon from Him, who is not only in general declared to be good and merciful to all; but who has "ſo loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son" to ſave it! Conſider the parables of the prodigal ſon, of the *loſt ſheep*, and of the *loſt* piece of *money*, in the goſpel: They will all ſhew you, that it is not the will of your Father, that any of you ſhould periſh; but that he "would have ALL men to be ſaved." The goſpel makes no exception. It affords an adequate relief to all, and is "the power of God unto ſalvation, to every one that

that believeth" *with all his heart.* The greatneſs of your paſt ſins, will be no objection againſt your being accepted in Chriſt, if you come unto God by him. God expects no righteouſneſs in or of you, in order to your being forgiven of Him; but only a truly penitent and humble ſenſe of your *unrighteouſneſs*, and an hearty conſent to receive "eternal life as his gift, thro' Jeſus Chriſt our Lord."—"Ho, every One that "thirſteth, [then] come ye to the waters, and he "that hath no money; come ye—without money "and without price—Incline your ear, (ſaith the "Lord of life,) and come unto me: Hear, and "your ſoul ſhall live." *—But,

* Iſai. LV. 1, 3. There is an expreſſion in the learned Mr. CALVIN's commentary upon my text, which ſeems juſtly exceptionable, as conveying an idea contrary to what is moſt clearly revealed in the holy ſcriptures; and ſetting unwarrantable bounds to the grace, and pardoning mercy of God. Let the reader judge—"Quamvis ergo pecca-"torum remiſſio theſaurus ſit *clauſus* REPROBIS, non tamen "Deum impedit ipſorum malitia et pravitas, quo minus in "eos quoque bonitatem effundat Deus; ſed quam ſine "ſenſu devorant." In Engliſh—Altho', therefore, the remiſſion of ſins is a treaſure *ſhut up* from the REPROBATE, yet their malice and wickedneſs does not prevent God's ſhowering down goodneſs upon them alſo; but which they devour without ſenſe or conſideration.

If by the *reprobate*, the learned author had here meant only wicked and ungodly men, conſidered as ſuch; and if by the *remiſſion of ſins being a treaſure ſhut up*, or cloſely locked with reſpect to them, he had intended no more, than that it was inacceſſible or unattainable by them, *while hardened in their ſins*; this would have been quite unexceptionable, and perfectly agreeable to ſcripture. But the words naturally convey a different idea; *viz.* That there are many perſons who, by a ſuppoſed eternal *decree* of reprobation, are *abſolutely* excluded from the benefit of pardon, or the grace of God revealed to the world. This was the known opinion

14. If, in reading the holy ſcriptures, we ſhould find any repreſentations or expreſſions relative to the divine conduct, which ſeem at firſt view to militate againſt the infinite goodneſs and mercy of God, we ſhould not too readily admit them in that ſeemingly harſh ſenſe: I mean, not till we have well examined them, compared them with other parts of ſcripture, and find that they will not bear any other conſtruction without manifeſt force and violence. There is nothing ſo frequently and clearly declared in ſcripture, as the perfect, univerſal goodneſs and mercy of God. This is a doctrine infinitely precious and important, and to which we muſt always adhere, as our ſheet-anchor, whatever becomes of any commonly-received opinions which interfere with it. To let ſome obſcure expreſſions which ſeldom occur, lead in the interpretation of ſcripture, as if they were prime, fundamental articles; inſtead of clear ones which occur almoſt in every page of the bible, is the moſt unnatural and prepoſterous thing in the world; a common error, of the moſt pernicious conſequence. This is more abſurd than for the "blind to be leaders of the blind:" It is like the blind leading thoſe that have their eyes *open*, and that *ſee clearly*—But, on the other hand, we ought to be very cautious leſt we reject any doctrine really revealed in ſcripture, under a

opinion of that learned man: A ſentiment, at once unſupported by reaſon or ſcripture; nay, contrary to both; highly derogatory to the goodneſs and grace of God, and of dangerous tendency. Nor is it a little ſtrange, that ſuch a ſentiment ſhould be found in a commentary upon words, which ſo ſtrongly expreſs the univerſal goodneſs and tender mercies of God, as thoſe of the text do: Eſpecially conſidering the words immediately preceeding,—*viz.* "The Lord is *gracious* and FULL of "*compaſſion*, ſlow to anger, and of great mercy." And it plainly appears that the learned man had theſe very words in his mind, when he wrote—"*Peccatorum remiſſio theſaurus eſt clauſus* REPROBIS!"—Pardon, a treaſure *locked up* againſt millions, in the *decree* of *abſolute reprobation!*—

a falſe pretence that it contradicts the goodneſs of God, with which it is conſiſtent. Our not well knowing how to reconcile it therewith, is no certain proof in all caſes, that it is irreconcileable. For we muſt be vain indeed, or allow ourſelves to be very imperfect and ſhort-ſighted creatures. However, it is not my intention here, to make a retreat into total darkneſs, or to reſolve every thing into myſtery, and human ignorance; as if men were incapable judges of goodneſs, juſtice and mercy in any caſe: Which is the ſhameful method that many have taken to get over all difficulties, and to anſwer all objections againſt their unſcriptural, abſurd and blaſphemous doctrines. We may be altogether as certain that ſome doctrines fathered upon the ſcriptures, are contrary to them, and inconſiſtent with mercy, goodneſs and juſtice, as we can poſſibly be, that any others are conſonant to them; or, indeed, that there is in nature any ſuch thing as goodneſs, juſtice or mercy.

15. If, therefore, my brethren, you know of any particular ſcheme or ſyſtem of chriſtianity (ſo called), two or three of the moſt diſtinguiſhing and leading principles of which, and the baſis on which the whole reſts, are plainly and certainly repugnant to the doctrine of God's univerſal goodneſs, and his tender mercies over all his works; you may be certain that ſuch ſcheme or ſyſtem is falſe;—abſolutely and wholly falſe, ſo far as it has any connexion with, or dependence upon, thoſe leading, fundamental & moſt diſtinguiſhing principles. Let me add, that if the fautors and aſſerters of ſuch a ſuppoſed ſyſtem, ſhould cry it up as peculiarly the doctrine of evangelical grace, and as tending to give us exalted ideas of the goodneſs and mercy of God, in contradiſtinction to all other ſyſtems; it would only make the matter ſo much the worſe: It would be ſo much the more impious; the

the greater abuſe of the holy ſcriptures, and an inſult upon the common ſenſe of mankind. If you know of *no ſuch ſcheme* as is here ſuppoſed, then be ſo kind as to let theſe remarks paſs for nothing.—But if you do; yet remember that human nature is frail and fallible; and that men may have upright hearts, while they have very wrong and pernicious notions in their heads: So that there is an evident call for mutual candor, forbearance and charity, betwixt thoſe that differ even widely in opinion; that they may, if poſſible, "keep the unity of the ſpirit in the bond of peace."

16. Let me, in the next place, caution wicked men againſt abuſing the ſcripture-doctrine of God's goodneſs; (for there is very little danger that any others will do ſo.) Do any imagine that they are ſafe in their evil courſes, becauſe God is good and merciful? That were a vain imagination; ſince thoſe courſes, in their own nature, tend to miſery and ruin, as was intimated before. But, perhaps, you flatter yourſelves, that however you may break God's commandments, yet He will not *puniſh* you in another world, if he is infinitely good and merciful; but, at the worſt, leave you to take the *natural* conſequence of your evil doings. This would be an equally falſe and groundleſs inference; tho' even that, would be ruinous and fatal. But God has eſtabliſhed a moral government in the univerſe, as beſt adapted to promote his own glory, and the common felicity of his intelligent creatures. And ſuch a kind of government, in its very nature, ſuppoſes that the obſtinately wicked and impenitent under it, ſhall be *puniſhed* by Him, as the Lord and Judge of all: And is it not declared, that at the great day, the wicked ſhall "go away into everlaſting *puniſhment*, "in the place" *prepared* for the devil and his angels!" In ſhort, the certainty of

of your puniſhment, if you perſevere in breaking God's commandments, may be clearly infer'd from his goodneſs itſelf; ſo far is that from being any ſort of ſecurity to you! Again: Do any of you rely upon the divine goodneſs and mercy, not in the practice of groſe immoralities, but in the practice of your ſuppoſed duties, and moral virtues, while you reject the goſpel of Chriſt, or that method of ſalvation which is revealed therein? This is alſo a groundleſs preſumption, unleſs you can plead a ſinleſs innocence and perfection; to which you will not pretend. What! will you rely on the goodneſs and mercy of God, while you deſpiſe his truth ſufficiently atteſted, and clearly proved to be ſuch?—while you tread under foot his Son from heaven, who came to redeem you; and reſiſt his Spirit! To do thus, is actually renouncing that very goodneſs, and thoſe tender mercies, on which you pretend to rely. Will you rely on the mercy of God, while you continue in that impenitence and unbelief, which God himſelf has declared ſhall terminate in ruin and perdition? How abſurd were this! It is the greateſt preſumption and madneſs for any, to whom the goſpel is preached, to rely on the mercy of God in any other way, courſe or practice, than that which God Himſelf has marked out. To depend upon it in any other way, is at once abſurd & impious; this being, ineffect, "making God a liar;" and aſſuming to yourſelves a right of preſcribing to the Almighty, what channel his goodneſs and mercy ſhall flow in, even contrary to his own declared will and purpoſe!—Know, that the counſel of God ſhall ſtand; and ſtand more immutable than the foundations of the earth, or the pillars of heaven, with whatever preſumptuous hopes vain men may amuſe and deceive themſelves! And if he that deſpiſed even Moſes's law, died *without mercy*, of how much ſorer puniſhment ſuppoſe ye!—But I forbear;

bear; remembering that inflicting terrible punishments, is spoken of in scripture as God's *strange work*; and therefore, certainly, not be made the theme of *common declamation*, as it is by many. There would be a peculiar impropriety in insisting long upon it in a discourse on the goodness and tender mercies of God. But yet there seemed to be a necessity of saying something upon this point, by way of warning to wicked men, who so grosly abuse that very goodness on which they presume. Let the wicked therefore forsake his way, and return unto the Lord, that he may have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will then abundantly pardon, thro' Jesus Christ; whom he hath "set forth to be a propitiation, thro' faith in his "blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission "of sins that are past, thro' the forbearance of God."

17. What solid ground have those that love God, and sincerely do his commandments, for hope, and intire confidence in him? Is it possible for you, my brethren, who do thus, to doubt of his love to you?—What! a sincere believer in Jesus Christ, and the promises of the gospel,—a truly good man, doubt the love and care of Him, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works?—of Him, who is good even to the evil and unthankful! This is a kind of paradox: But yet it is not an absolute impossibility. And if you should, in any measure, distrust the particular kindness and love of God to you, let the following passages in our Saviour's discourses, inspire you with a firm, and truly filial confidence in Him—"Behold the fowles of the air; "for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather "into barns: Yet your heavenly Father feedeth "them. Are not ye *much better than they?*" * And again: "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? "and *not one of them* is forgotten before God. But "the

* Matth. Chap. VI.

" the very *hairs of your head* are all numbered. Fear " not therefore; ye are of *more value than many* " SPARROWS." *

18. THE conſideration of God's goodneſs and mercy, particularly as manifeſted in the holy ſcriptures, in the redemption of the world by Chriſt, naturally ſuggeſts very pleaſing hopes, and a glorious proſpect, with reference to the concluſion, or final reſult of that moſt wonderful interpoſition of grace. It cannot be denied, that ever ſince the apoſtacy of our firſt parents, there have been, and ſtill are, ſome things of a dark and gloomy appearance, when conſidered by themſelves.—So much folly, ſuperſtition and wickedneſs there is, " in this preſent evil world!"—But when we conſider the declared end of Chriſt's manifeſtation in the fleſh,— to give his life a ranſom for all, and to deſtroy the works of the devil: When we conſider the numerous prophecies reſpecting the deſtruction of ſin and death, and the future glory of Chriſt's kingdom ON EARTH: When we conſider, that he muſt reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet, the laſt of which is DEATH; and till he hath ſubdued ALL THINGS unto himſelf: When we reflect, that according to the apoſtle Paul, where ſin has abounded, grace does much more abound; and that the ſame *creature* [or *creation*] which was originally made ſubject to vanity, is to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God: When we conſider the parallel which is inſtituted and carried on by the ſame apoſtle, betwixt the firſt and ſecond Adam, in his epiſtle to the Romans; and his expreſs aſſertion in another, that " as in Adam all die, even ſo in Chriſt ſhall all be made alive; *but every man in his own order*:" * In a word, when we duly conſider that there is a certain "reſtitution of ALL

" THINGS,

* Luke Chap. XII. † 1 Cor. XV. 22, 23.

" THINGS, ſpoken of by the mouth of all the holy pro-
" phets ſince the world began :" When we duly conſider theſe things, I ſay, light and comfort ariſe out of darkneſs and ſorrow. And we may, without the leaſt preſumption, conclude in general that, in the revolution of ages, ſomething far more grand, important and glorious than any thing which is vulgarly imagined, ſhall actually be the reſult of Chriſt's coming down from heaven to die on a croſs, of his reſurrection from the dead, and of his being crowned with glory and honor, as Lord both of the *dead* and of the *living*.—The word of God, and his mercy, endure for ever : Nor will he leave any thing which is truly his own work, unfiniſhed.—" As the heavens
" are higher than the earth," ſaith the Lord, " ſo are
" my ways higher than your ways ; and my thoughts
" than your thoughts—My word—that goeth forth
" out of my mouth—ſhall not return unto me void,
" but it ſhall accompliſh that which I pleaſe ; and it
" ſhall *proſper in the thing whereto I ſent it.*" *

To conclude then : Let us all, young men and maidens, old men and children, love and honor, extol and obey the God and Father of all, whoſe tender mercies are over all his works ; and who has been ſo gracious and bountiful to ourſelves in particular. If we ſincerely do thus, as becometh the children of the Higheſt, we ſhall, in due time, partake of his goodneſs in a far more glorious manner & meaſure, than we can in the earthly houſe of this tabernacle. We ſhall doubtleſs alſo have a far more clear, diſtinct and perfect knowledge, than we can poſſibly have at preſent, of what is intended in ſome apparently grand and ſublime, and yet difficult paſſages in the ſacred oracles ; particularly that of John the Divine, with which I cloſe : " And EVERY CREATURE which
" is

* Iſai. LV. 9, 11.

" is in HEAVEN, and on the EARTH, and UNDER " THE EARTH, and ſuch as are in the SEA, and ALL " THAT ARE IN THEM, heard I ſaying, Bleſſing, and " honor, and glory, and power be unto Him that " ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for " ever and ever." * AMEN !

* Rev. V. 13.

THE END.

PSALM XL. 9——11.

IN full Aſſemblies I have told
Thy Truth and Righteouſneſs at large :
Nor did, Thou know'ſt, my Lips with-hold
From uttering what thou gav'ſt in Charge :
Nor kept within my Breaſt confin'd,
Thy Faithfulneſs, and ſaving Grace ;
But preach'd thy Love, for all deſign'd
That all might That, and Truth embrace.
Then let thoſe Mercies I declar'd
To others, Lord, extend to me :
Thy loving Kindneſs my Reward,
Thy Truth my ſafe Protection be !

CORRECTIONS.

Page	*Line*	*From*	*Read*
27	15	bottom	worlds
34	7	bot.	will take
40	——	margin	LUKE
43	——	margin	Pſalm CXI.
45	3	top	than thoſe
48	5	top	of reaſon,
87	11	bottom	being, in effect,
88	2	bot.	again

N. B. Some leſs material errors are omitted.